The Sacred and the Secular:

The ‘*ulama* of Najaf in Iraqi politics

between 1950 and 1980

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Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies

As a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

in October 2012

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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Abstract

Najaf has played a pivotal role in the political, religious and intellectual life in Iraq, as well as the wider Arab and Islamic world. However, since the formation of the Iraqi state in 1921, Najaf's position as political arbiter declined in comparison with Baghdad. The Political activism of young Shi'is had reflected a deep sense of discontent against the Iraqi central state, on the one hand, and the declining role of the Shi'a religious community in the holy cities on the other. The 1958 Iraqi Revolution presented both a challenge and an opportunity to Najafi '*ulama*. Thus, Najaf's Shi'a *marja'iyya* had engaged in ideological and political hostilities between Abdu Karim Qasim and the strong ICP, on one hand, and Arab nationalists, backed by Naser's Egypt on the other. Najaf's role in the dispute was affected by its regional connections, and hence directed its standing towards Qasim's regime. This religio-political campaign eventually led to the ousting of Qasim in February 1963. Over the next six years (1963-68), Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim adopted two contrasting approaches towards Baghdad's government; he advocated no specific Shi'a demands during the first months (the Ba'th period). Al-Hakim showed a radical turn towards the first 'Arif' government, calling for a fair representation within the Iraqi government. Al-Hakim returned to his old peaceful attitude with the arrival of the second 'Arif government. The rise of the Ba'th party to power in July 1968 brought an end to Shi'a activism. While the Ba'th maintained cordial relations with al-Hakim between July 1968 and April 1969, relations deteriorated rapidly in June 1969 ending in irrevocable divorce. Following al-Hakim's death in 1970, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr emerged as the most prominent *mujtahid* in Najaf. Al-Sadr gradually moved from his non-intervention approach to a more radical and revolutionary position after the failure of the Najaf uprising in 1977. Al-Sadr's action was spontaneous and unplanned, lacking all the requirements needed for making

it a successful revolution. It ended with al-Sadr’s execution in April 1980, bringing Iraq to new extended phase under the Ba’th regime.

Contents

Abbreviations

AA: Asian Affairs

AAS: Asian and African Studies

ASQ: Arab Studies Quarterly

BJMES: British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

BSMESB: British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin

BSOAS: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

EI: Encyclopedia of Islam

ICP: Iraqi Communist Party

IJCIS: International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies

ILM: Iranian Liberation Movement

IJMES: International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

IAO: Islamic Action Organization

IS: Iranian Studies

ISE: Islamic Shi'a Encyclopedia

MW: The Moslem (Muslim) World

MES: Middle Eastern Studies

NDP: National Democratic Party

RCC: Revolutionary Command Council, the governing body under the Ba'th in Iraq.

RL: Regional Leadership of the Ba'th Barty

SI: Studia Islamica

Introduction

Najaf and Iraqi politics: past and present

Soon after the fall of Saddam Hussain in April 2003, the Shi'is of Iraq became the focus of widespread newsreporting. Once the war ended, the Shi'is emerged as an organized power, filling the vacuum of government in Iraq, administering hospitals, mosques and even government institutions. Shi'a organizations, parties, and above all their religious authority, the *marja'iyya*, came out as a dominating power in the new Iraq. This culminated in the 2005 election when the Shi'a coalition achieved an overwhelming victory to form the first democratic government in the post-Saddam era led by the Shi'a majority. Behind this well-organized action, and far from the capital Baghdad, Najaf has been the key player in the Iraqi arena. This dramatic transformation captured the attention of many observers and commentators, who came out to assert that:

'The future of Iraq will be decided not in the US-led talks among the approved opposition parties but behind a battered grey metal door in Najaf, 100 miles south of Baghdad, that protects the *hawza*, the city's main Shi'a seminary where Iraq's leading clerics teach'.[1]

Indeed, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf* (Najaf, the most honored) represents a unique case study in shaping Iraqi politics. Being one of the most holy Shi'a cities, along with Karbala, Kadhamayya and Samara, Najaf has undoubtedly played a pivotal role in political, religious and intellectual life in Iraq as well as in the Arab and wider Islamic world. Thomas Lyell, the British officer who served in Iraq during the 1920s, wisely pointed out 'that the understanding of the Holy Cities of Iraq (Najaf in particular) is the key to understanding of the strength and the weakness of the people'.[2]

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[1] Eween MacAskill, *The Guardian*, May 3, 2003, p.25. See also, Cole, J, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq*, Amsterdam University Press, 2006.

[2] Rich.P, *Iraq and Imperialism* Thomas, Lyell's *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia*, Cambridge- 1991, p.13. For more details about Najaf's role in the history of Iraq, see for example, Litvak, M, *the Shi'i Ulama of Najaf and Karbala*, 1791-1904, Cambridge University Press- 1998; Mallat, C, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'i*

This assessment appears to be true in the Iraq of today more than ever. Following the American invasion of Iraq, Nakash went further to claim that it is not only 'Iraq's political future' but also 'America's standing in the Middle East, in large measure depends 'on relations between Najaf and Washington'.[3] Nakash further elaborated that:

'Shi'ite Islam was reshaped twice during the 20th century- first by the rise of the modern nation- state, and then by the Islamic revolution in Iran. The revival of Najaf today may lead to a third transformation, one that could affect not only Shiite Islam but the entire Middle East'.[4]

Without doubt, Najaf's significant position stems from the fact it possesses a critical and decisive role in determining not only the future of Iraqi Shi'is, but representing the principal key to the understanding of Shi'ism itself. The role of Najaf's *'ulama* in Iraqi society is significant and highly acknowledged.[5] Also, the role of Najafi *'ulama* in transforming Iranian society has been well studied and informed. Surely, this role marks the beginning of contemporary Iran, signaling the birth of Shi'a Iran after the mass conversion into Shi'a doctrine. Although this role has been subject to debate, the contribution of Arab *'ulama* is undeniable.[6]

Admittedly, Najaf's role surpassed the boundaries of the region to reach the Indian subcontinent and the heart of the Ottoman empire. Indeed, very few studies have recorded and shed light on the role of Najafi *'ulama* in India, and to a lesser extent their relationship with the Ottoman state.[7] This area deserves more attention considering the

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International, Cambridge, 1993; Nakash, Y, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

[3] *Newsweek*, March 1, 2004, p.20.

[4] Ibid, p.23.

[5] See for example, Litvak, M, *The Shi'i Ulama of Najaf and Karbala*, 1791-1904, ibid; Nakash, Y, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, ibid.

[6] For the role of Shi'a Arab *'ulama* in conversing the Persian society into Shi'ism, see Abisaab, R, J, *Converting Persia. Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*, I.B.Tauris-New York-2004. For a good account of Shi'a *'ulama* in the Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1906-9), see Hairi, A H, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, a Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics*, Leiden-E.J. Brill, 1977.

[7] Concerning the Ottoman policy towards the Shi'a community in Iraq, see Deringil, S, the Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq, pp. (45-62) *Die Welt des Islam,* XXX, 1990; Çetinsaya, Gökhan, (2005) the Caliph and Mujtahids: Ottoman Policy towards the Shiite Community Iraq in the Late Nineteenth Century, *MES*, vol., 41, No.4, pp.561-74; Eich, T, Abu

amount of sources accumulating for centuries in the Ottoman archives dealing with Iraq.

Despite the fact that a significant deal of research on Shi'ism has been done in the last three decades, we have to admit that a great bulk of this literature concentrated on Iran (pre- and post- revolution) as a response to political developments on the grounds. Unsurprisingly, Shi'a research became synonymous with Iranian studies and vise versa. As such, studies and research carried out by Marr, Joyes and Batatu on Shi'i '*ulama* and political movements in Iraq were almost always written under the assumption of the impact of the Iranian revolution on the Iraqi context. For this reason, many misrepresentations and even misleading assessments were reached about Shi'i *'ulama*, Iraqi Shi'a movements and Najaf. We have to confess that, in part, the lack of access to Iraqi Shi'a literature due to security reasons has hitherto contributed to the incomplete picture presented.

Although some studies, such as those by 'Aziz and Jabar, have focused on the Iraqi context, paying critical attention to the local developments that led to the emergence of the Shi'a movement itself, nonetheless they were chiefly preoccupied with reading literature without giving due consideration to other major factors, external players in particular. All the preceding studies, however, share one flaw; simply paying lip service, if at all, to other political groups and social agents within the city, hence constructing a monolithic portrayal of Najaf and a vague picture of the political conflicts in Iraq in general.

Methodology, scope and structure

Instead of presenting and re-producing a stereotypical image of Najaf, the image that has been repeatedly produced in Arabic, Shi'a literature in particular, and amongst western scholars of Shi'a studies, this research tries to represent a complex and

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l-Huda, the Rifa'ia and Shiism in Hamidian Iraq, p.150 (142-152) *Der Islam*, 80, 2003. About Shi'i *'ulama* of Iraqi holy cities and Shi'a states in India, see Hollister, John, Norman, *The Shi'a of India*, London, 1953.

unprecedented picture of Najaf and Shi'ism in general. This is done through giving non-religious actors due attention rather than focusing entirely on religious institutions (*hawza*, *Marja'iyya*, and *'ulama* as the prime agents in the city). Although the religious actors remain a major part of this study, I shall follow a twofold approach to my analysis: investigating the dynamic nature of the conflict between successive Iraqi governments and Shi'a religious institutions on the one hand, and exploring the internal interaction between social, political and religious agencies within Najaf on the other.

The study covers the period between 1950 and 1980. The first years of the 1950s witnessed the rise of the Iraqi Communist Party, nationalist movements and the emergence, for the first time, of Shi'a political activism. The year 1980 represents a watershed moment in Iraqi history as it marked the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war and the beginning of the new phase in contemporary Iraqi history.

As this study attempts to examine the role of Najaf's '*ulama* in Iraqi politics, it seeks to answer many questions, notably the followings: what role did Najaf play in making Iraqi politics? What were the main forces in Najaf that influenced the political positions of Shi'a religious authorities in Najaf? What were the external players and actors that were at work during this period? Was Najaf oblivious of the conflicting interests between Baghdad and its foes, be they in Iraq or in the region?

The study is divided into six chapters with introduction and final conclusion. Chapter one outlines the historical development of Najaf from a small isolated town into a sacred city and gradually acquiring the position of the most important Shi'a learning centre. The chapter shall consider the ebb and flow in the status of the city and how Najaf established itself as a religious sacred site. The chapter will trace the source of Najaf's political role, through the *'ulama* mediating standing between the conflicting neighbors: the Safavids and Ottomans. It will end with the withdrawal of the Ottoman forces from Najaf in 1916, leaving the city in a position of self-autonomy for nearly two

years.

Chapter two looks at the construction of Najaf's social fabric and how different social groups in Najaf evolved during the last three centuries. By investigating economic developments and political transformations, the chapter will review the emergence of new social groups and how this affected the relationships between social actors in the city. The chapter will also consider political upheavals in Iran, particularly the Tobacco crisis and the Constitutional Revolution, and how these events were reflected and resounded in Najaf. It will then follow the *'ulama's* leading role in the Iraqi politics, notably their remarkable participation in the Jihad Campaign of 1915 and later in the 1920 Revolution.

Chapter three covers the period between the formation of the Iraqi state in 1921 and the downfall of the monarchy in 1958. This chapter will examine the conflict between Iraqi nationalists and Communist movement as this reading provides important insights for understanding future political events within the Najafi context. Further, I shall explain how the *'ulama* came to engage in the political strife between rival secular movements and why these political groups were so keen in securing the former's support.

Chapter four will asses the relationship between Najaf's *'ulama* and Qasim's regime. It will investigate the changing phases of this relationship, examining the role of internal powers and external actors that were present behind the scenes. I will also look into the activities of the Shi'a movement (*Jama'at al-Ulama* and the Da'wa party) and their conflict with both the ICP and later the Ba'th. The chapter will consider the importance of external factors (neglected entirely in all research dealt with Najaf and Iraqi Shi'a movement), drawing attention to the complex relationship between Najaf and both Iran and Egypt, the then major influencing states upon the Iraqi politics. In this sense, I locate the historical and political developments in Najaf within its national context, and see Najaf through an Iraqi prism.

Chapter five will discuss the two phases of Najaf's interaction with the two 'Arif brothers. While the first part evaluates in detail the reactions of Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim and the Da'wa party towards 'Abdul Salam 'Arif, it will also reflect on the changing courses of domestic policies and regional alliances and their impact upon Najaf's directions. The second part will focus on the short tenure of the second 'Arif and the confusing positions undertaken by Najaf's *Marja'iyya* towards Baghdad.

Chapter six will examine the Ba'th reign between 1968 and 1980. It shall analyse how both internal and external factors bolstered the Ba'th position in Baghdad to adopt repressive policies against Iraqi opposition including Najaf's *Marja'iyya*. The first period ends with the death of Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim in 1970. Thereafter, the Ba'th launched a harsh offensive against Shi'i activists and *'ulama*, which coincided with the cultivation of friendly relations with Imam Khomeini in the latter's campaign against the Shah. The last part of this chapter will cover the Najaf uprising of 1977 and its impact upon Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's thinking, leading up to the period of the Iranian Revolution in 1978-79. A critical comparison will be made between the reasons of success of Khomeini's movement and the failure of al-Sadr's Islamic revolution.

Literature: an overall assessment

The study consulted a wide collection of primary and secondary sources dispersed in Britain and Iraq. In spite of the fact that Britain was indirectly entangled in Iraqi affairs between 1958 and 1980, the British files, correspondences and reports during the 1960s in particular are of exceptional value as they shed light on many issues relevant to this study. The American files also provide good sources of information especially regarding the spread of Communist ideas in the holy cities of Iraq. Furthermore, I made good use of many private papers in Najaf, most of them have been used for the first time ever in scholarship in this research.

I am of the view that there are always unwritten and ignored narratives in the telling of

history. For this reason, I carried out many interviews, personal meetings and correspondences with individuals from Najaf, concentrating on those who lived in the city as well as those who participated in the making of its history. The purpose behind these interviews was not only to fill many gaps in the literature written hitherto, but also to support the arguments and hypothesis presented in this research. I started my preliminary research before 2003 carrying out interviews with political activists from varied Islamist, Communists and nationalist groups as well as independent individuals. After 2003, it became easier for a researcher not only to benefit from the newfound freedom of speech in Iraq, but also to use the documents and private papers that exist in Najaf's libraries and private collections. Since 2003, I made Najaf my second home, paying several visits to the city. During these trips, I had the chance to collect literature and to talk to many people. I owe a lot to the people who provided me with assistance and access to some valuable manuscripts, documents and old and rare publications. My thanks go to the helpful individuals in the Kashif al-Ghita library, Al-Hakim Public library and Sayyed Hussain Abu Sa'ieda Foundation and many other anonymous people who made this research possible.

In general, I may classify the secondary sources used in this study into four categories:

1. General works about Iraq: This includes books and works that dealt with Iraq in both Arabic and English. From the Arabic works, al-Wardi's *Lamahat Ijtimayya* (Social Glimpses) deserves special acknowledgment for its extensive accounts of the Iraqi society in general with some deep insights concerning the Shi'is of Iraq in particular.

No other book raised as much interest in Iraq as Batatu's *Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements in Iraq* in the last two decades. Batatu, who had a very rare opportunity to analyze the rich archive of the Iraqi Communist Party, wrote detailed accounts of this movement and followed the original roots of nationalist movements in Iraq. Batatu's book however neglected the development of Shi'a movements; hence, he

dedicated later a separate study to these movements. We should add that Batatu's book places more emphasis on the internal political, social and economic factors in Iraq. This book is still indispensable for any researcher writing about Iraq.

2. Najafi literature: Under this category, we may put together different sorts of writing such as biographies, memoirs, history of Najaf and its *hawza*, and the like. Mahbuba's *Madhi al-Najaf wa Hadhiraha* (Najaf's Past and Present) represents one of the earliest and most comprehensive studies written so far about Najaf's history. Volume 1 in particular gives extensive details about the city itself, the development of the Najafi *hawza* as well as internal and external factors that shaped the history of the holy city. This book is rich with small but very expressive glimpses that convey social, political and religious aspects in the city.

The same could be said with regard to Hirz-ul-Din's *Marif al-Rijal* (Men's Biographies). Although this book is more concerned with the biographies of scholars, poets and other leading figures, it is still a very useful book for any researcher interested in Najaf. Additionally, there have been a few works published recently about Najaf and a number of research papers produced by Kufa University in the last two decades. Kamil al-Joboori made great efforts in this regard, thus entitling him to the accolade of the leading historian of Najaf. I also benefited from some works written and published recently about Shi'a *'ulama*: Baqir al-Sadr in particular. Al-Khirsan and al-Amili both deserve special acknowledgment for their comprehensive research and dedicated spirit, providing unknown and original accounts, which allowed me to construct a new picture.

3. General Shi'a literature: This includes works that dealt with Shi'a doctrine, beliefs history and institutions as well as intellectual thought. Recently, Shi'a studies flourished to satisfy the demands to understand the rise in Shi'a activism. Of these books, Nakash's *The Shi'is of Iraq*, stands as one of the earliest works dedicated especially for the Shi'a of Iraq. Based on his doctoral dissertation, Nakash's book can be regarded as

the first study devoted completely to the history of the Shi'a of Iraq between the late of 19th century and the mid 20th century. In addition, Jabar's study of Iraqi Shi'a movements deserves special appreciation for its analytical and comprehensive approach.

4. Political literature of Iraqi parties: This covers all published books, magazines, pamphlets and many other similar political statements issued by Iraqi political parties during the period of study. Communist, nationalist and Islamist literatures, each represents the view of its adherents, were examined and used in this study in a way that explores the internal interactions and conflicts. Although this kind of writing tends to adopt a specific point of view, it is still important in highlighting political events, and providing a context to the internal Iraqi socio-political landscape.

Again, the significance of this research stems from the fact that contemporary Iraq has been largely shaped by the events that took place during the period under study. Thus, the study aims at providing critical insights in order to understand the historical background of disputes among Shi'a groups by following the diverse orientations pursued by different groups in Najaf in particular. Owing to the fact that Shi'a political groups have always harbored deep conflicting views over political positions, therefore, exclusively consulting theological literature, orders, statements, *fatwas*, etc, is not sufficient to arrive at an informed understanding of political events as political and social history rather than the presence of a shared creed is more present amongst Shi'a actors. Without a critical examination of previous events, it would be difficult to grasp the tragedy of Iraq, at least in modern times, as the roots, causes and motives lie in the near past.

Chapter I

Najaf: From Holy Grave to Holy City

‘All origins’ confesses Ernest Renan, ‘are obscure, religious origins more so than others’.[8] Likewise, Lewis Mumford admits in *The City in History* that the origins of city are uncertain.[9] Yet on the contrary to the widely-held view that links the emergence of cities with the existence of rivers; thus with life, Mumford proposes a different theory, arguing that ‘the dead were the first to have a permanent dwelling’.[10] He concludes that ‘the city of the dead is the forerunner, almost the core of every living city’.[11] This view applies precisely to Najaf; the city that had been once merely a desert and became thereafter one of the most holy places; where every Shi’i Muslim yearns to live or at least to be buried in its terrain.

This chapter will look into Najaf’s historical developments through examining both factual and mythological records. By doing so; the chapter will endeavor to evaluate how real and imaginative histories shaped Najaf’s status within the Islamic history, forming a better understanding of Najaf’s position in the Shi’a mind and how a combination of religious texts and historical developments affected its place in the modern Iraqi politics.

Foundations: mythology and history

To begin with, it is of significant importance to distinguish between Shi’i religious conventions from historical literatures in searching for Najaf’s genesis. Levi-Strauss

[8] Renan, E, *Studies of Religious History*, William Heinemann, London, 1893, p.153.
[9] Mumford, L, *The City in History,* Secker & Warburg, London, 1961, p.3
[10] Ibid, p.7
[11] Ibid.pp.7-8

states accurately that 'the gap which exists in our mind to some extent between mythology and history can probably be preached by studying histories which are conceived as not at all separated from but as a continuation of mythology'.[12]

While Shi'a texts tend to go back in history, relating the story of Najaf from Biblical and Quranic interpretations, the first references to Najaf found in Arabic sources come from the pre-Islamic period. Shi'a sources, for example, relate Quranic verses and the sayings of the Shi'a Imams that allude to Najaf here and there. Shi'a sources report, among many, that Abraham chose Najaf as a beloved garden; Moses was assigned there with his message, save the thousands of prophets who were buried there.[13] Further, Shi'a texts clearly link the name of Najaf itself to the story of the Flood. According to this story, the son of the Prophet Noah who refused to enter the Ark took refuge on the top of a mountain near Najaf, stating that he will wait until he saw where the water settled. As the story continues, the mountain was shattered and the son drowned. Thereafter, a river appeared in the place of the mountain but this river dried up a few years later. The place therefore was called Nay-Jaff, which means literally 'the dried river'.[14] Obviously, these stories, among many others, uncover not the real existence of Najaf, but rather they underpin its position as a blessed place in popular Shi'a consciousness. This is to say that religious tales and traditions attributed to the Shi'a Imams certainly did contribute to formulating the religious sanctity that lies behind the small city of Najaf.

Historically speaking, Najaf's story finds its foundation not in Najaf itself rather in al-Hira, (south-east Najaf), which was 'the most important Arab city in the Fertile

[12] Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, Routledge-London, 2001, p.37.
[13] See al-Majlisi, M B, *Bihar-ul Anwar*, Mosasat al-Wafa, Beirut, 1983, vol, 27, pp.226-396; al-Najafi al-Buraqi, H, *Tarikh al-Najaf, al-Yateemat al-Gharawayat wa-l Tuhfat al-Najafayy fi-l al-Ardh al-Mubarakat aal-Zakayyat*, Najaf, 2009, pp.112-4 & 211-28.
[14] Al-Kufi, Muhammad, *Nuzhat al-Gharai fi Tarikh al-Najaf*, Najaf, 1952, pp.6-12. For more details about the mythological genesis of Najaf, see also Donaldson, Dwight M, *The Shi'it Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak,* London, 1933.p 56.

Crescent during the three centuries preceding the rise of Islam,'[15] and Kufa, the great Islamic city that played a major role in the political, religious and intellectual history of Islamic civilization. No doubt, the emergence of Najaf as a city was closely associated with both al-Hira and Kufa, the fact that makes the history of this area interrelated and inseparable. For this reason, some scholars tend to call this area *al-Muthalath al-Hadhari* (*the Triangle of Civilization*) on the grounds that it produced a mixed heritage of these three cities with their diverse cultures; Arabic, Christian, and Persian.[16]

Located between the Arabian Peninsula from one side and the Persian Empire and the Byzantine Empire on the other, 'al-Hira became the confluence of three interacting cultural currents'. Furthermore, al-Hira was the centre of Arab Christianity 'whence Christianity was transmitted to the Arabian Peninsula'.[17] Recently, historical and archeological findings have proved that Najaf was a major centre of Arab Christianity before the advent of Islam.[18] The vicinity around Najaf was home to Christian monks who had built monasteries such as Dayr Mar Fathiyun, Dayr al-Swad, Dayr Hana, Dayr Abd al-Masih and Dayr Hind al-Kubra during the reign of Mundhir 111(A.D.503-554), the Arab king of al-Hira. According to Arabic sources, *Bahr-ul al-Najaf* (the Sea of Najaf) at that time witnessed an active trade movement from Syria, India and even China. Najaf's location enabled it to be one link of many along the famous trading route that connected the Fertile Crescent, Nejd and Mecca to Yemen. Furthermore, al-Hira, had been very famous as a centre of Arabic literature, hosting great Arab poets such as al-Nabigha al-Dhobyani, Labid ibn Rabie'a, Turfa ibn al-'Abd who recited their poems

[15] EI, vol.111, p. 462

[16] About the relationship between al-Hira, al-Kufa and al-Najaf and the idea of the triangle of civilization see Muhammad Fakhr-ul al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf fi al-Asr al-Abassi* 132/749-656/1258.,p.177; al-Hakim, Hassan, *al-Mufasal fi Tarikh al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Qum-2007, vol,1, pp.15-7.

[17] EI, vol, 111, p.462 & vol, V11, p.860.

[18] Rashad, F, 'Al-Najaf Tahtadhuno Akbar Maqbarah lil- Masseihyyin al-Qudama fi al-'Alam', *Al-Hayat*, No.17693, 13 September-2011, p.9. See Appendics, 1.

before its kings. Consequently, Arab historians regard this period of history as the golden age of Arab poetry.[19]

Kufa, Baghdad and Najaf: transferring Shi'ism

With the advent of Islam and establishment of Kufa as a new basis for the Arab conquering armies, the accumulated intellectual heritage of al-Hira, namely pre-Islamic Arabic literature and poetry as well as the rich Christian religious thought, passed over to the former. Obviously, the founding of Kufa in 17/ 638 as the second Islamic city after Basrah, had determined the prospect of Najaf. Being the centre of the Shi'a and the capital of the Islamic state during the reign of Imam 'Ali, Kufa became a new home for the Arab Yemeni tribes of Hamdan, Sulaim, Thakif, Taghlib, Kinda, Azd, Tamim, Madhhidj and Nakha' which started to settle permanently in Iraq. As we shall see, the two elements that profoundly affected the social structure of Kufa, and later on Najaf, are Shi'ism and Arab Yemeni character.[20]

Between its creation and throughout the following two centuries, leading up to the eight century after Hijra, Kufa enjoyed reputation as a major centre of religious, intellectual and political activity. During this phase, Kufa contributed widely to Islamic civilization, making a distinguished mark on Arabic linguistic studies, poetry, philosophical discourses and Quranic and Hadith sciences. Kufa had been the most active Shi'i centre during the first three centuries through its intellectual innovation, theological contribution or even political protest. It was in Kufa, where Shi'i scholars set up their theological and canonical principles. It is reported that hundreds of students were attending the circles of *kalam* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) in the Great Mosque of Kufa.[21]

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[19] For more details about al-Hira see, Fikhr-ul al-Din, ibid, pp. 23-36.

[20] EI, vol, V, p.346; Djait, Hisham, *Nashat al-Madinat al-'Arabayyat al-Islamayyat, al-Kufa*, Dar al-Tala'a, Beirut, 2005, pp.359-60; Fayad, 'A, *Tarikh al-Imamayya wa Aslafihim min al-*Shi'a, Beirut, 1975, pp.61-3; al-Turihi M K, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Beirut, 2002, pp.65-67; al-Hakim, H, *al-Mufasal*, ibid, pp.205-6.

[21] Djait, Hisham, ibid, p.362; Fayadh, 'A, *Tarikh al-Imamayya wa Aslafihim*, ibid, 58-61

Most significantly, Kufa had been a safe haven for various opposition groups to the central authorities in Damascus and Baghdad during the Umayyad and Abbasids periods respectively. In fact, Kufa was the birthplace of most Shi'a and Khariji opposition movements. In this sense, it had always been a suitable environment for echoing the voices of rebels and oppressed people.

Although Shi'ism has emerged in the early years of Islam, political Shi'ism developed as a distinct creed with its religious beliefs and doctrinal principles in Kufa. It was in Kufa that the influential Shi'i thinkers and theologians like Hisham ibn al-Hakam set out their first rational and religious commentaries.[22] Thanks to Imam 'Ali's auspices and later Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, Shi'ism gained its deep roots in Kufa, giving the city an almost certain Shi'a character. The Kufan School, with its political movements (up to 150), cultural heritage (150-250) and ideological doctrines (250-350), spread not only to Najaf, the nascent Shi'i centre but as far afield Baghdad and Qum.[23] Kufa however had been overshadowed by the emergence of Baghdad by the first third of 2nd/8th century. From this moment onwards, Baghdad flourished as the greatest city in the Islamic world, where *fiqh* (jurisprudence), philosophy, natural sciences, and literature and so on reached its heyday.[24] Indeed, Kufa declined in the 4th/10th century paving the way for Baghdad and then to Najaf to emerge in 334/945 as the new centre of Shi'ism.[25]

Shi'a jurisprudence appears to have been evolved in very late stage (the beginning of the 4th/10th century) in comparison with the Sunni schools, which formulated *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* as new disciplines around the end of the 2nd/9th century.[26] The reason

[22] Djait, H, Ibid, pp.354-5; Fayad, 'A, ibid, pp.174-80.
[23] Hinds, Martin, *Studies in Early Islamic History*, Princeton.USA, 1996, pp.1-27; Djait, Hisham, ibid, pp.357-61; al-Hakim, Hassan, *al-Mufasal*, ibid, vol, 4,p.12.
[24] Halm, H, *Shia Islam, From Religion to Revolution*, pp.95-100.
[25]For more details about Kufa, see EI vol. V.p.348 and vol. (Shi'a) pp. (420-424); Momen, M, *an Introduction to Shi'i Islam, the History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, Yale University Press New Haven and London, 1985, pp.73-74
[26]Al-Sadr, M B, *al-Ma'lim al-Jadeedah lul-Sul*, Beirut, 1989, p.60; Mutahari, M, *Muhadarat fi al-Din wal Ajtima*, p.516, Qum, 2007; Calder, N, Doubt and Prerogative: The Emergence of an

behind that, it is said, lies in the fact that Shi'a community had been in a direct contact with the Imams, hence felt no imperative need for intermediaries. Even when the Twelfth Imam went in hide, withdrawing into his *al-Ghaiba al-Sughrah* (Lesser Occultation), Shi'i believers were in direct contact with him through *al-Sufara al-'Arba'a* (the Four Ambassadors).With the death of 'Ali .b. Muhammad al-Samari, the fourth and the last ambassadors of the Hidden Imam in 329/941, the Shi'a community entered a new course of their religious and political life.[27]

Soon after the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam, the Shi'a community realized the need to organize their activities through building a system of networks. Despite the fact that Shi'i theologians compiled some early *fiqh* works in Kufa, it was in Qum and Rayy (in Iran today) that the first collections of Shi'a traditions classified by great Shi'i scholars like Ibn Babuya al-Qumi and al-Kulaini.[28]

Nonetheless, it was in Baghdad that Shi'i '*ulama* constituted a genuine distinct group benefiting first from the gradual disintegrating of the 'Abbasid Caliphate mid the third century and secondly from the support of the Buwaihids, the Shi'i new masters of Baghdad. Again it was Baghdad rather than Najaf that observed the birth of the first Shi'i academic centre. According to Halm, 'it was also the Baghdadis who produced the principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) henceforth used by the Imamis, and assigned reason (*'aql*) a fundamental role'. This school advanced ahead by the dint of Muhammad ibn al-Nu'man al-Mufid, his disciple al-Sayyed al-Murtada and later on Shaikh al-Tusi.[29]

Imami Shi'i Theory of Ijtihad, *SI*, p.58 No. 70(1989), pp. 57-78. For different view, see al-Sistani, 'Ali, *al-Rafid fi ilm al-usul*, edited by Al-Qutaifi. M, Beirut, 1994. pp 10-11.

[27] See for example, Hussain, J, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, London, 1982, from chapter IV to VII; Momen, M, An *Introduction to Shi'i Islam, The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*; pp.162-5; Halm, H, *The Shia Islam: From Religion to Revolution*, pp88-89

[28] For more details about the contribution of Kufa School, see al-Fadhli, 'A, A, *Tarikh al-Tashri'a al-Islami*, Beirut-1992.pp.105-43.

[29] Halm, H, *Shiism*, ibid, p.51.

It could be argued; then, that Najaf had obviously been no more than a desert, inhabited only by wild animals during the first half of the Abbasid period. This is indicated in the traditional story of the discovery the Grave of Imam 'Ali. According to the Shi'a sources, Imam 'Ali ordered his sons and close companions, that upon his death, they should put his corpse on a camel and where this camel knelt, there should be his Grave. Shi'a sources add that as they were digging the Grave, they found a shield bearing the inscription: 'This is one of the things which Noah has stored for 'Ali ibn Abi Talib'. Since then, the Grave remained known only for the Twelve Shi'a Imams and their close circle.[30] Throughout Umayyad rule, the site of the grave was still undiscovered. It was, by chance or miracle, that Harun al-Rashid, the 'Abbasid Caliph discovered the Grave in 172/788 when he was chasing a gazelle on a hunting trip. As a sign of homage and respect, al-Rashid commanded to build a dome over the Grave. Thanks to the Grave, settlers increased, particularly attracting Sufis, dervishes and perhaps some 'Alids. It is hard therefore to claim that Najaf was an inhabited place before the beginning of the 3rd century. From the middle of the 3rd century onwards, however, the little town of Najaf became a better substitute for the Shi'a particularly after the rapid decline of Kufa. What explains this shift was the apparent attention that Najaf started receiving from the Shi'a princes at the expense of Kufa, which became exposed to the devastating raids of the Bedouin tribes of Khafaja.

Najaf attracted more care by the end of the 3rd century when the Shi'a governor of Tabaristan, Muhammad b. Zaid, paid a visit to the Grave of Imam 'Ali. It seems that Muhammad b. Zaid was the one who erected the first wall around Najaf. During the 3rd century leading to the early 4th century, Shi'a princes and kings paid great concern to the Grave. With more attention from the Buwaihids, the new governors of Baghdad, the little town witnessed a new movement of building. The Buwaihid prince Adadud-

[30] Al-Kufi, Muhammad, ibid, p.13; Halm, H, *The Shia Islam: from Religion to Revolution*, p.7.

Dawlah, for example, ordered a magnificent dome over the Grave be constructed and it was to last until the 7th century. He also supplied water to the city by digging a canal from the Euphrates, near Kufa. It is probably for this reason that the population of Najaf had grown to reach at the Buwaihid reign up to six thousand; the vast majority of whom were 'Alid Ashraf.[31] Najaf undoubtedly emerged as a point of focus for Shi'is especially after the spread of Shi'ism to other parts of Islamic territories throughout the 3rd century with the establishment of many Shi'i states and provinces during the whole next century.[32]

Shaikh al-Tusi and founding the *hawza* in Najaf

The great transformation, however, took place when Shaikh al-Tusi (known as *Shaikh al Tafa*- the Shaikh of the sect) moved to Najaf in 448/1056. Al-Tusi who found himself under attacks in Baghdad, which plunged into notorious sectarian strife between Shi'a and Hanabili communities in 440/1048, left Baghdad and migrated to Najaf. The ascent of the Hanbali doctrine in Baghdad as an official creed had coincided with the coming of the Sunni Seljuqs (the new governors of Baghdad- 449/1057), and ultimately led to restrictions on the Shi'a community. Subsequently, sectarian tension broke out between Hanbali and Shi'a communities, enforcing Shaikh al-Tusi escaping to Najaf as his new home. Al-Tusi's movement had undisputedly made Najaf the main Shi'a learning centre. The distance between Najaf and Baghdad, the centre of Caliphate, seems to have made Najaf a fitting choice for al-Tusi; yet another reason for Najaf being chosen might be the existence of Imam 'Ali's Grave, and the reverence with which it is viewed among all Muslims. Although some Shi'a scholars claim that Najaf had already been a

[31] Al-Asadi, K, 'Tarikh Marqad al-Imam 'Ali wa-l al-Atwar al-Mubakira lil- Najaf al-Ashraf', (pp.178-229), in '*al-Najaf al-Ashraf Ishamat fil-Hadhrat al-Insanayya*, London, 1999, p.223.

[32] Al-Mudhafar, M H, *Tarikh al-Shi'a*, Beirut-1985, p.77; Halm, H, ibid, p.96. According to Halm 'the tenth century could almost be characterized as the Shi'i century'. See also Momen, M, ibid, p.76.

centre of religious studies, it is only with the arrival of Shaikh al-Tusi that Najaf became a widely recognized centre of learning.[33]

Thanks to the new comer, Najaf's reputation as a new scholarly centre particularly for Twelver Shi'ism was bolstered. This in turn, was incentive for many scholars to come to study and live. It is clear that the revival of Najaf as a Shi'a seminary was at the expense of both al-Kufa, which suffered a rapid decline, and Baghdad, the major Shi'a School that became no longer safe.[34] As such, the Arab Shi'a families of al-Kufa and the 'Alid Ashraf from Baghdad and elsewhere started to move during the 4th century to Najaf, which became by the end of this century a home of around two thousand 'Alid *Ashraf* and *sada*.[35] Ibn Hawkal, the Arab traveler presented in his book probably one of the earliest description for Najaf during the 4th /10th century. Ibn Hawkal states that there was 'a dome on four columns over the tomb at Mashhad 'Ali', which according to him, had been built by the Hamdanid prince Abu-l-Hayja, the governor of Mosul in 292 /904.[36]

Najaf in shadow

However, Najaf dominance lasted for less than a century when Hilla (south of Baghdad) emerged as the main centre of Shi'a learning and remained so for more than three centuries. The Hilla School played significant role as it developed and pushed ahead the rationalistic tendency among the Shi'a scholars. Thanks to the efforts made by Muhammad ibn Idris (d. 598/1202), Ja'far ibn al-Hasan (*al-Muhaqqiq* d. 676/1277) and

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[33] See al-Hakim, Hassan, *Shaikh Al-Tusi*, Najaf, 1975.pp.94-101; idem, *al-Mufasal*, ibid, vol, 4, pp.5-24; al-Amin, H, *Islamic Shi'ite Encyclopedia*, vol.4. p.84; al-Gharawi, M, *al-Hawza al-'Almayya fi al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Beirut-1994.pp.19-38; Al-Mudhafar, M H, ibid.pp.83-4, 88; Momen.M, ibid, p.82; Al-Fadhli, 'A A, *Tarikh al-Tashri'a al-Islami*, Beirut, 1992, p.333; idem, *Daleel al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Najaf, pp.39-41; Shams-ul Din, M R, *Hadeeth al-Jama'ah al-Najafayya*, Najaf-1953, pp.13-14; Al-Mudhafar, M R, Jama'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf, *Al-Azhar Magazine*, Part. 6, vol. 32, p. 604 (pp. 604-607), 1960.

[34] EI, vol,VII. p.860.

[35] Al-Asadi, K, Tarikh Marqad al-Imam 'Ali, ibid, p.223.

[36] Ibn Hawkal, *Sourat al-Aradh*, Beirut, 1979, p. 215; Strange, G L, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, London, 1905, p.77, EI, vol, VII, p.860.

especially ibn al-Mutahar (*al-'Allama* d.726/1325), the principle of *ijtihad* incorporated as a major source into the Shi'a jurisprudence. In fact, it was al-'Allama al-Hilli, (d.1325) that incorporated, for the first time, the using of reason to obtain the legal ruling or *ijtihad*.[37] Thus, Hilla's rational school brought about a major implication in the future advancement of Najaf's *hawza*. Also no less important to notice that the domination of Hilla School for this long period has proved that there is no such strong connection between the existence of a sacred site with flourishing of Shi'i learning and the very founding of *hawza* itself. Obviously, courses of ebb and tide in Najaf's *hawza* have depended mostly upon the situation of the city itself, domestic conditions (water supply, for example), surrounding political circumstances and many other interrelated factors.

During this period, Najaf preserved its status as a sacred city and was left intact unlike Baghdad that was devastated at the hands of Mongols in 656/1258 onward. It is more accurate to say that Najaf witnessed a revival during the Mongol era due to the fact that the Mongols and their successor the Timurids converted to Shi'ism. The Mongoli Khan Olijetu visited Najaf in 710/1310 under the influence of the great Shi'a scholar- Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli. [38] The Timurids gave special treatment to Najaf, donating money and presents to the Grave and the people of Najaf. In 666/1267, for instance, the Mongols built a hostel for students at Najaf and more importantly, they established a new canal to bring water from the Euphrates to Najaf. According to Ibn Battuta, the famous Arab traveler, who visited Najaf in 726/1326, the city was 'one of the finest, most populous and most substantially built cities in Iraq'. In his description, Ibn Battuta reported:

'It is a fine town, situated in a wide rocky plain... It has beautiful clean bazaars. ..We came to

[37]Al-Sadr, M.B, *al-Ma'lim al-Jadeedah lul-Sul*, Beirut,1989, p.60; Mutahari, M, *Muhadarat fi al-Din wal Ajtima*', p.516, Qum, 2007; Halm, H, ibid, pp.67-8.
[38] Al-'Azawi, A, *Tarikh al-Iraq Bayna Ihtelalain*, vol, 1 Baghdad-Baghdad Press-1935, pp.407-10; Halm, H, *Shiism*, Edinburgh University Press, 1991.p.66; Al-Mudhafar, M H, *Tarikh al-Shi'a*, ibid, p.89 & pp. 212-16; al-Hakim, Hassan, *al-Mufasal*, ibid, pp.332-6

the inner Bab al-Hadra, where there is the tomb, which they say is the tomb of 'Ali…the inhabitants of the town are all Shi'ites…this town pays no taxes or dues and has no governor, but is under the sole control of the Naqib al-Ashraf. Its people are traders of great enterprise, brave and generous and excellent company on a journey, but they are fanatical about 'Ali'.[39]

Ibn Battuta also spoke of the religious schools in Najaf and the system of learning. As we will see, his description regarding its inhabitants, administration and the form of teaching, had still been valid up until the outset of the 20th century.

In the second half of the 10th/17th century, Najaf reemerged as a principal Shi'i learning centre when Shaikh al-Karaki (d. 940/1533) migrated to the city. Supplying the city with water and building its wall by the Safavids helped revive Najaf again, making the small town a better place for living and studying. This short period interrupted with the rise of Karbala as the home of both Shi'i learning and Ikhbaraya School, the role that continued during the next two centuries (11th/18th and 12 th/19th).[40]

Najaf repossessed again its leading position with the beginning of the 19th century when Sayyed Mahdi Buhr-ul 'Ulum moved from Karbala to Najaf, making the latter a home of *hawza* and Usulism School after the decline of Ikhbaraya in both Iraq and Iran and eclipse of Karbala. From then up until the turn of the 20th century, Najaf bolstered its position and reputation as unrivalled learning centre for Shi'a world.[41] Admittedly, Najaf's *hawza* owes a great credit to names like Shaikh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita, Muhammad Hassan (*Sahib al-Jawahir*), Shaikh Murtada al-Ansari and many others

[39] Ibn Battuta *Travels in Asia and Africa*, London, 1929.pp. 81-82.
[40] Bahr-ul 'Ulum, M, 'al-Derasat wa tareekhaha fi al-Najaf', pp.57-77 in al-Khalili, J, *Mousoua'at al-'Atabat al-Moqadasah*, Najaf section (7), vol. 2, pp.9-110; Al-Fadhli, A A, ibid, pp. 399-403; idem, *Daleel al-Najaf*, pp.42-44 & 44-48.
[41]Al-Mudhafar, M. R, in '*Jawahir Al-Kalam*' (the introduction, pp 2-24), pp.8-13, Beirut,1981; idem, Jama'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf, *Al-Azhar Magazine*, ibid, p. 604; Al-Bustani , M, Madrasat al-Najaf al-fiqhaya fi al-'ahad al-Othmani, p.74, *The Arabic Magazine for Ottoman Studies*, No, 17-18, September, 1998, pp.69-111; al-Hakim, Hassan, *al-Mufasal*, ibid, vol, 4, pp.137-224; Bahr-ul 'Ulum, M, ibid, pp.74-83; Al-Fadhli, 'A A, ibid. pp 453-6; idem, *Daleel al-Najaf*, pp.53-75; Shams-ul Din, M R, ibid, pp.48-60 & 62-76. See Appendics 2.

who imprinted their distinguished mark on the development of its intellectual reputation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Najaf, however, transcended its religious status as a sacred place and a major Shi'i learning centre when it acquired a new political role but at a later stage. This role was granted to Najaf accidentally, rather than sought by its '*ulama* as a result of new unexpected developments in the neighboring Iran.

Status consolidated: Najaf, the Safavids and the Qajars

Najaf had relatively been in the margin until the beginning of the 16th century, when Iran became a Shi'a state. This development brought Najaf, the small isolated town in the huge Ottoman Empire, into the front line.

From one side, the establishment of their rival empires brought both the Safivids and the Ottomans to conflict over Iraq for various strategic, economic, religious, and political reasons. Thus, in response to the Safavid invasion of Iraq in 1508, the Ottomans (who brought most of the Arab territories under their control), confronted their ambitious neighbour, making Iraq a crossroad of conflicts between their Sunni Empire and the new Shi'a state in Iran.[42]

In 1501, Ismail Safavid succeeded in controlling Iran and proclaimed himself Shah. Shah Ismail declared Twelver Shi'ism as the sole doctrine of Iran. For this purpose and because the majority of Persians were Sunnis, Ismail launched a religious campaign, compelling Sunni Persians to convert to Shi'i Islam. After Ismail's death, his successor and son, Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576) continued the father's work, importing Shi'i scholars and '*ulama* from Iraq, Bahrain and mainly from Lebanon. Tahmasp appointed Shaikh 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Ali al-Karaki (1465-1534), a great Najafi scholar of Lebanese

[42] For general survey of the Safavid state, see Newman, A, *Safavid Iran. Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, I.B.Tauris-London, 2009. For more details about its relationships with the Ottomans, see Lapidus, Ira, M, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.234-263.

origin as a chief and assigned him with immense powers in his state. In 1533, Tahmasp issued an order in which he called al-Karaki, 'the seal of the *mujtahids*', and 'deputy of the Twelfth Imam'. Al-Karaki considered the Safavid state as a realization of the long awaited legitimate Shi'a political authority in preparation for the return of *al-Imam al-Muntadhar* (the Awaited Imam). For the same reason, al-Karaki rejected *al-Taqyya* (prudent dissimulation) as it was not permitted any longer for the Shi'is as long as they were governed by a Shi'a state. Al-Karaki himself designated the Imams for Friday prayer in every city in Iran and endowed these Imams with the due legal authority to collect the *Kharaj*, *al-Zakat* (alms) and *Khums* (one-fifth of the Shi'i faithful yearly income). Many Arab '*ulama* were appointed as Shaikh al-Islam, prayer leaders, judges, administrators and even ministers to serve in the Shi'i Safavid state.[43]

The new situation resulted in a thorny position for Najaf, which was squeezed between the governing Sunni Ottomans and the new Shi'a authority in Iran. Moreover, the new state brought into question the validity of the traditional Shi'a theory that make unlawful any involvement in political affairs in the absence of *al-Imam al-Ghaieb* (the Hidden Imam). Accordingly, no ruler could claim legitimacy as the Twelve Imams are the only legitimate rulers on earth. This moment was seminal as it represented- according to Ibrahim, a break moment with the traditional Shi'a thought.[44] The new break also raised questions concerning the nature of the relationship between the Shi'i '*ulama* and temporal authority.[45] More significantly, though, this religio-political

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[43] See for more details, al-Wardi, A, *Lamahat Ijtimayya min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Hadeeth*, vol.1.pp.56-71; al-Shibi, K M, *al-Tariq ah al-Soofaya wa Rawasibaha fi al-'Iraq al-Mua'sir*. Maktabat al-Nahdha-Baghdad-1967.pp.33-6; Marwa, 'A, *al-Tashai' bayna Jabal 'Amil wa Iran*, Riad al-Rayyes Books, London-1987.pp.43-158. Marwa provides good details about the contribution of the Lebanese Shi'a '*ulama* who immigrated to Iran, Hourani, A, From Jabal 'Amil to Persia, *BSOAS*, vol.49, No.1 (1986), pp.133-40. For moderate view, see Abisaab.R.J: *Converting Persia. Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*, I.B.Tauris-New York-2004.pp.2-30 For different view see Newman, A, J, The Myth of The Clerical Migration to Safawid Iran; Arab Shiite Opposition to Ali al-Karaki and Safawid Shiism, *Die Welt des Islam*, vol.333.No.1 (April-1993).pp.66-112.

[44] Ibrahim, F, *Al-Fiqeh wa al-Dawla, al-Fikr al-Seyasi al-Shii*, 1998, p.144.

[45] Enayat, H, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 1982, University of Texas Press.pp.26-27;

question caused deep theological and intellectual disputes within the Shi'a seminaries and confronted the quietist attitude showed by Shi'i '*ulama* for most of the previous six centuries.

No surprising, many Najafi '*ulama* and *mullahs* often declined the Safavid invitations to visit the kingdom and rejected their money on the grounds that all temporal rulers are illegitimate in the age of *al-Ghaibat al-Kubra* (the Greater Occultation). For example, Shaikh Ahmad al-Ardebili (known al-Mukaddas al-Ardebili for his piety) turned down Shah Abbas's invitation to visit Isfahan, preferring to stay in Najaf. In fact, Shaikh al-Ardebili was of the view that only *fuqaha* (jurisprudents), who represent the Hidden Imam, have the right to collect *Kharaj* and receive the alms (*al-Zakat*), a view that denies the Safavids of political legitimacy. Al-Ardebili however was not alone in this standing as some other *'ulama* echoed his views. Shaikh Ibrahim al-Qutaifi (d.1544) was more vocal against al-Karaki as he pursued a vehement critique of his positions.[46] Al-Qutaifi challenged al-Karaki in every religious issue, taking the opposite view whether concerning Friday prayer or the role of *faqih* in the state. He went further to claim that 'fighting this man (al-Karaki) in his erred matters is better than Jihad by fighting'.[47] One should admit that the al-Karaki-al-Qutaifi contest was more than a legal dispute or the result of mere conflicting views over religious questions; rather it was a reflection of their political and social standing. In other words, the political position towards the Safavids was a test of two contrasting social, religious and even personal views.

Ibrahim, F, *Al-Fiqeh wa al-Dawla,* ibid, pp.131-159; Halm, H, *Shiism,* pp104-106; Momen, M, Authority and Opposition in Twelver Shi'ism (48-66) in Burrell, R.M, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, London, 1989.pp56-57.

[46] Ibrahim, F, pp.150-9, al-Qazwini, J, *Tarikh al-Moasasat al-Dinayya al-Shi'ayya min al-'Asr al-Bouayhi ala Nahayat al'Asr al-Safawi al-Awal (300-1000H/ 912-1591*), Dar al-Rafidayin-Beirut, 1st published, pp.285-8; Newman, Andrew, *Safavid Iran*, ibid, p.37.

[47] Al-Khiwinsari, Muhammad B, *Rawdhat al-Janat fi Ahwal al-'Ulama wal Sadat*, al-Dar al-Islammayya, Beirut, 1st publishing, 1991, vol, 1, p.25; al-Qazwini, J, *Tarikh al-Moasasat al-Dinayya al-Shi'ayya*, p.289.

Despite the general negative attitude in Najaf, the Safavids paid huge consideration to the city and the other Holy Cities of Iraq (Karbala, Kadhamayya and Samara). In this respect, they donated money, presents and gifts to the Shrine of Imam ‘Ali and visited the Holy Cites as a sign of piety and support. Realizing the significance of Najaf and its impact upon the Shi’is in general, the Safavids sought to strengthen their position in Iraq. The intense enmity between the Safavids and the Ottomans, no doubt, pushed the former to promote their ties with the ‘*ulama* of Najaf in the hope of winning their support. Najafi *‘ulama*, who preferred staying a neutral part felt sometimes in need of Safavids, in the face of constraints and restrictions imposed by the Ottomans.[48]

Until the beginning of the 18th century, Najaf seems to have been marked by its Arab charecter and traditions. It was only following the collapse of the Safavid Empire in 1722 that Najaf came under a new wave of immigration from Iran. Since then the Shi’i ‘*ulama* of Iran and particularly from Isfahan moved in a great numbers between 1722-1763 towards Najaf, Karbala and other Shi‘a cities. As a result of political disturbances and disorder, many ‘*ulama* in Iran preferred to leave towards Iraq. Persian immigrants increased notably after the ascension of Nadir Shah (1736-1747) to the throne. Indeed, the Persian immigrants had their own mark on Najaf, the city that up until that point was characterized by its Arab Bedouin tradition. The Arabic language, therefore, had to pay the price, as it became no longer the sole language in studying or even in the affairs of daily life. Thereafter, Arabic literature underwent a period of inactivity due to the fact that most of the Persians did not speak Arabic; hence did not appreciate classic Arabic poetry, rhetoric and grammar. Hirz-ul al-Din confesses that the massive immigration of the foreigners was the reason that caused such a situation in Najaf.[49]

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[48] Ibrahim, F, ibid, pp.131-159; Al-Turihi M K, ibid, p.231; al-Hakim, H, *al-Mufasal*, pp.345-50.

[49] Harz al-Din, *Ma’rif al-Rijal*, vol, 3.p.137; Al-Turihi M K, ibid, p.35

Paradoxically, disorder and instability in Iran in the period between the collapse of the Safavid state and the emergence of the Qajars served the Najaf's scholarly reputation. This was mainly due to the fact that a great number of the Persian *'ulama* were compelled to leave Iran, heading for the *Atabat* (threshold) of Iraq. Thus, the revival of religious studies in Najaf undoubtedly owes a lot to the mentioned immigrant scholars and students.[50]

In contrast to the Safavids who claimed descent from the seventh Shi'i Imam, Musa al-Kadhem, the Qajar dynasty who ruled Iran from 1779 until 1925, was Sunni in origin. Surprisingly enough, they represented themselves as advocators of Shi'ism. For this reason, they looked to Najaf and Karbala for support for two reasons; firstly, they needed the support of Najaf to offset the increasing power of '*ulama* in Iran. In fact, the community of Iranian '*ulama* succeeded in constructing a very distinct position during the Safavid rule onwards, forming a powerful class.[51] As the Qajars cannot claim that they are descendents of the Prophet Muhammad, at least they can claim guardianship of Shi'ism. Shi'i *Usuli 'ulama*, in their turn, were attempting hard to bring the Qajari shahs to their side particularly amidst their confrontation against what were considered heretic groups. In Iran and Iraq, Shi'i *'ulama* condemned and even excommunicated groups like Sufis, Shaikhis and Babis under the pretext of preserving the good faith of the Shi'a community.[52] Therefore, one can talk of a mutual interest between Shi'i *'ulama* and the Qajari shahs according to which the '*ulama* remained the sole representatives of the

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[50] Al-Mudhafar in, al-Najafi, M H, *Jawaher al-Kalam*, p.9; Litvak, M, *The Shi'i 'ulama of Najaf and Karbala*, ibid,p.170

[51] Martin, V, *Islam and Modernism, The Iranian Revolution of 1906*, pp.18-9; Ibrahim, F, pp.198-200.

[52] Martin, V, ibid, pp.21-2; Ibrahim, F, ibid, pp.202-8.

Hidden Imam, recognizing at the same time the Qajar rulers as a legitimate secular authority who could protect Shi'a religion.[53]

The second reason that compelled the Qajars to seek the support of Najaf is similar to the motivations that drove their Safavids predecessors pertaining to their constant struggle with the Ottomans. Najaf's '*ulama*, adopted, in this regard, a very cautios attitude and often sought to adopt a mediating role towards the Qajar-Ottoman conflict, unlike their outright hostility towards Russia where they called for jihad and granted the Qajars full moral, religious and political support.

The rise of the Qajars in Iran had coincided with the victory of the *Usuliyya* School over the *Akhbariyya.* The fierce dispute between the *Usuliyya* and the *Akhbariyya* throughout the preceding centuries came to its end in the Qajar period. Algar argues that the *Akhbariyya* ascendance to the stage is associated to some degree with the exclusion of the '*ulama* 'from participation in the affairs of a Shi'a state, namely the interregnum between Safavid and Qajar rule'.[54]

Admittedly, the victory of the *Usuliyya* School had been accomplished by virtue of Muhammad Baqir al-Bihbihani (1117/1705-1208/1803), the head of the *Usuliyya*, who sought to eliminate any influence of the *Akhbariyya* School. The *Akhbariyya* School exerted the last attempt to survive at the hands of Mirza Muhammad al-Akhbari who did his utmost to persuade the Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah (1797-1834) to support the *Akhbariyya*. This was however, a failed venture as the *Usuliyya* School advanced in its way with the leadership of Shaikh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita, the disciple of al-Bihbihani.[55] Shaikh Ja'far; now the head of the *Usuliyya* School in Najaf presents in his book *Kashif al-Ghita*, both his regard to the Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah and his vehement argument

[53] Halm, H, *Shi'a Islam: from Religion to Revolution*, 1997, p.117. See also Martin, V, ibid, pp.22-30. For more details about the Qajar period, see Algar, Hamid, *Religion and State in Iran, 1758-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, Berkeley, 1969

[54] Algar, H, ibid, p. 35; Momen, M, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* pp.130-142

[55] Kashif al-Ghita, M H, *al-'Abaqat al-'Anbarayya fil al-Tabaqat al-Ja'farayya*, al-Qazwini, J (edi), Beirut, 1998, pp.86-100.

against the *Akhbariyya*. Shaikh Ja'far went further in his support for the Qajars when he granted the Qajar's rulers the representation of the Hidden Imam.[56] Thanks to Fath 'Ali Shah, the wall of Najaf was re-built again and for the last time to survive until the mid of 1920s. Due to the fact that it is a flat area, Najaf seemed exposed to regular raids from the Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. In order to secure the Shrine of Imam 'Ali and the city's inhabitants, the Shi'a princes and kings ordered this wall be built around the city. Time and again, Safavids, Qajars and the kings of Oudha in India rebuilt the wall.This wall, which was reported by Ibn Hawkal, remained one of the main features of Najaf throughout its history, and has undoubtedly made the area safer against any raids. Thanks to the wall, Najaf defended itself quite well against the Bedouin tribes, the Wahabies, the Ottomans and later on the British forces in 1918.[57].

The heart of Shi'ism and the heart of Caliphate: Najaf and Ottoman State

If Shi'ism had been the link between Najaf and Iran, *de facto* authority was the form of connection between Najaf and the Ottoman government. And like their opponent in Iran, the Ottomans showed special treatment to the holy cities, and Najaf in particular.

Although it was no more than a *Qaymmaqamia* linked to *Mutasarafiya* of Karbala, Najaf had received a great deal of attention from Ottomans.[58] In this respect, the Ottomans have accustomed to appoint the Qaym-maqam of Najaf directly from Istanbul. The importance of Najaf for the Ottomans lies not only in its position as a buffer zone between them and their neighbor (Safavids and Qajars), but also for its financial share to the whole budget in comparison with other provinces. As we will see (chapter two), Najaf together with Karbala and other holy cities, provided the Ottoman

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[56] Al-Qazwini, J, *Al-Marja'iyya al-Dinayya al-'Alya 'Ainda al-Shi'a al-Imamayya*, Dar al-Rafidayin, Beirut, 2005, pp.179-89.
[57] Wallis, E A, *By Nile and Tigris*, London, 1920, vol,11, p.275; al-Hassani, 'A R, *Mujaz Tarikh al-Buldan al-'Iraqiyah*, 2nd edition, 1933, Sidon; al-Mudhafar, M R in, Al-Najafi.M.H, *Jawaher al-Kalam*, Beirut, 1981, vol.1.p.11.
[58] The Ottomans divided Iraq into three *Wilayats*: Baghdad, Mosul and Basrah. *Mutasarafiya* Karbala accordingly belonged to Baghdad and *Qaymmaqamia* Najaf belongs to Karbala.

budget with enormous amounts of money. The significant contributions of these cities to the Ottoman provincial treasury made the latter almost dependent on their commercial activities. In 1852, for instance, a temporary standstill of such commercial activities (visitation, trade) caused by the course of conflict between the Ottomans and the Qajars, ‘moved the *defterdar* (provincial treasury) of that city (Baghdad) to complain that ‘he could not release one-tenth of the revenue for the year’.[59]

The Ottomans therefore have exhibited their interest to attract Najaf through delivering services or responding positively to the needs of the holy city. For example, once Sulaiman the Magnificent controlled Iraq in 1534, he immediately paid visits to the Holy Shrines of Imam ‘Ali in Najaf and Imam Hussain and his brother Abbas in Karbala. Likewise, both Selim II and his successor Murad III, ordered the cleaning of the old canal so as to bring water from the Euphrates to Najaf.[60] It should be stressed here that lack of a regular water supply had always been one of the most serious problems that affected Najaf throughout its history. It is not surprising that the population of Najaf has decreased rapidly year after year because of lack of water. It is sufficient here to mention that while the inhabitants of Najaf were around six thousands during the Abbasid age, as we noticed, there remained only thirty inhabited houses in the late 16th century. This problem continued to affect the city until the first decades of the 20th century.[61]

The Ottomans and the Shi’a missinoary

Generally speaking, the relationships between the Ottoman authority and Najaf passed through different phases, depending chiefly on the political standing of the Ottoman central authority in Istanbul. Cole observed that the history of Ottoman rule over the

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[59] Fattah, H, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf, 1745-1900*, State University of New York Press, 1997, p.70.

[60] Al-Turihi, M K, ibid, p.52.

[61] Serkis, Ya’qub, *Mabahith ‘Iraqiyya*, Baghdad, 1948-1981, vol, 2. pp. 62-63; al-Turihi M K, ibid, pp, 50-61; Nakash, Y, *The Shi’is of Iraq*, ibid, p.19.

Twelver Shi'a minority could be distinguished 'into three distinct historical periods. The first period, 1516-1750, witnessed often harsh Sunni Ottoman rule over most Arab Twelvers, with Ottoman repression often exacerbated by the Twelver chauvinism of the Safavid rulers of Iran. The second, from 1750 until the mid-19th century, saw Twelver local elites come to the fore at a time of decentralization in the great Sunni empire…[and the third] from the mid-nineteenth century, [when] Twelver minorities lost whatever previous semi- autonomy they had gained during the age of the politics of the notables'.[62]

Throughout the 18th century up to the first decades of the 19th century, the Ottomans resigned themselves from direct involvement in the local affairs, assigning local groups and notables with wide responsibilities. For the Ottomans, maintaining order and levying taxes were the only primary tasks. The decentralization policy pursued by the Ottomans during this period was accompanied by the emergence of local authorities, which in turn pushed for a more independent role. This was clear in Karbala, Najaf and Hilla in particular.[63] As a result, Najaf had succeeded in distancing itself from the central authority, benefiting from its remote location and religious prestige. Further, this was a result of the weakening grip of the Ottoman sultan who had been unable to extend his authority beyond Baghdad and/or preferred to leave these centres to the governor of Baghdad.

Najaf also benefited from the decentralization policies adopted by the Ottoman administration in Baghdad in promoting Shi'ism, therefore, extending Najaf's religious influence. No doubt, Najaf was the main drive behind the gradual conversion of the Bedouin tribes in the south of Iraq into Shi'ism and this issue was apparently one of the most problematic issues that confronted the Ottomans in Iraq.

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[62] Cole, J, *Sacred Spaces and Holy War, the Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*, London, 2002, pp.17-29.

[63] For more details about the Ottoman policy in Iraq, see Longrigg. Stephen; *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, Oxford, U.K, 1925; pp.200-322; Andre, R, *The Great Arab Cities in the 16th-18th centuries*.pp.3-16. See for more details about the Ottoman policy towards the Shi'a community, Nawar, 'Abd 'al-'Aziz Sulaiman, *Tarikh al-'Iraq al-hadith min nihayat hukm Da'ud Basha ila nihayat hukm Madhat Basha* , Cairo, 1968; Cole, J, ibid, pp. 17-30.

According to Nakash, it was only after the conversion of 'Iraq's nominally Sunni Arab tribes to Shi'ism, mainly during the 19th century, that the share of the Shi'is grew to its 1919 and 1932 estimates of 53 and 56 percent of the population, respectively'.[64] Apparently, the '*ulama* of Najaf sponsored, encouraged and funded this activity through sending *sada* and *mumins* to the Bedouin tribes to disseminate the Shi'i creed.

To counter the increasing influence of Shi'i '*ulama* among these tribes, the Ottoman authority and Sunni '*ulama*, sought to confront this campaign through various ways. The main vehicle, it was thought, for containing this challenge was education. Shaikh-ul-Islam, Huseyin Husnu Efendi, insisted in his report to the Ottoman government, on 'the crucial role of the Sunni *medreses* in Baghdad and the appointment of competent '*ulema* to Iraq to debate with their Shii counterparts'.[65] Taking into consideration the number and scale of Shi'a missionaries settled among the Bedouins, the Sunni '*ulama* seemed ineffectual. The Ottoman government in turn supported the Rifa'iya order, the policy that 'played a key role in Abdulhamid II's policy directed at the Shi'a in Iraq as well as in his measures to sedentarize the nomadic population in Iraq and Syria'.[66] Thomas Eich argues that this policy was designed and supported by Abu l-Huda as-Sayyadi, the religious advisor of Sultan Abdulhamid II between 1879 and 1909. As-Sayyadi had encouraged, through different ways the propagation of the Rifa'ya Sufi order in the Shi'a regions and particularly in the south of Iraq to offset the influence of the Shi'i *'ulama*. It is hard however to believe that the aim of the Ottoman policy was to convert Shi'i faithful to Sunnism due to the difficulty of this task. Probably this policy was perceived as the best tool for integrating Shi'is into the Ottoman Empire in

[64] Nakash, ibid. p.25. In fact, Nakash adopts al-Wardi's argument (in the above-mentioned book) concerning the conversion of Arab nomadic tribes to Shi'ism (this was perhaps true as far as the Arab tribes in the south of Iraq was concerned but not the Euphrates region).

[65] Deringil, S, the Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq, pp. (45-62) *Die Welt des Islam,* XXX, 1990,p.50

[66] Eich, T, Abu l-Huda, the Rifa'ia and Shiism in Hamidian Iraq, p.150 (142-152) *Der Islam*, 80, 2003.

order to achieve ‘social engineering’.[67] In response to the increased Iranian presence in the shrine cities, the Ottoman officials suggested to confront this influence by ‘the granting of munificent largesse to the holy shrines of Karbela and Najaf ’.[68] There is no evidence that indicates the success of Ottoman policies in confronting Shi’a missionaries, nor any call to use force against them.[69]

It is worth stressing here that although Shi’ism spread among the Bedouin tribes of the South, ties with the holy cities had almost been delicate. In fact; the role of Shi’i ‘*ulama* in the South of Iraq (except Basrah) remained less important until the mid of twentieth century. This is due to the fact that the southern areas were rural and less linked with the holy cities when compared with the Euphrates region. A striking example in this regard has been the failure of the Shi’i *’ulama* in convincing the tribes of the south to join the 1920 Iraqi Revolution as we shall later see.

Again, the Ottomans recognized Najaf's special position among the Shi’is of Iraq, considering any consequences that might affect their whole presence in Iraq. No doubt, they realized the strong relationship between Najaf and the surrounding Arab tribes in the Middle Euphrates. Najaf, in effect, was capable of mobilizing these tribes against the central authority of Baghdad. The Arab tribes of Kufa, Shamaya, Rumaitha and Hilla had been closely linked with Najaf through various links. Visitation of the Shrine, attending religious ceremonies, trade and marriages are a few examples to mention. This factor, namely the close associations between Najaf and the armed tribes may partially explain why Najib Basha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad hesitated to attack the city in 1844 after his bloody victory in Karbala. In comparison with Karbala, Najaf was in effect aided by the armed confederations of the Arab tribes and peasantry communities. Najafi ‘*ulama* had enjoyed a strong and noticeable influence in Shi’a

[67] Deringle, S, ibid.p.60.
[68] Ibid, p.51.
[69] Deringle, S, ibid, pp.51, 52, 60.

towns and rural areas alike. It is worth noting that while the real support for '*ulama* in Iran stemmed from the merchants of bazaars, the real partisans of '*ulama* in Iraq were peasants. This reflects, among other things, the solid position of the *'ulama* in rural areas, where the level of education was very low as well as the nature of social stratum within the Shi'is of Iraq during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the '*ulama* were at the top of the Shi'a hierarchy.[70]

However, it should be paused here to stress again that the '*ulama* of Najaf had in general maintained normal relationship with the Ottomans, who realized the influence of this group among their people. For this very reason, the Ottomans often approached '*ulama* in the attempt to settle their conflicts with some tribes. It is reported that some *'ulama* in Karbala and Najaf even issued *fatwas* that entitle the Ottomans to take action against the tribes. As we shall see, disorder and disturbances caused by tribes and other gangs pushed '*ulama* to solicit the Ottoman authority in order to bring the city under its control.[71]

On the other hand, Najaf operated as a mediator power between the Ottomans and their Persian opponent. Najaf's position as a sacred place for all Muslims and its reputation as a great learning centre enabled the small city to play this great role. In this regard Shaikh Musa Kashif al-Ghita, then the *marja'i*, conducted in 1263/1847 a successful attempt to rehabilitate the relationship between the Ottomans and the Qajars who were on the verge of war, leading them to sign the treaty of Erzurum.[72]

With reinforcement of their centralization policy, the Ottoman authority was capable of controlling the three Mesopotamian provinces (Baghdad, Mosul and Basrah) in 1833 and then the two Holy Cities of Karbala and Najaf in 1843 and 1844 respectively.

[70] Lapidus, ibid, p.474; Keddi, N, Class Structure and Political Power in Iran since 1796, ibid, pp (305-330), *IS*, vol., XI, 1978.
[71] Al-Muslimi al-'Aqili, M.H, *Tarikh al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Qum,1427.H.p.118.
[72] Al-Turihi,M K. ibid.pp.158-159; Al-Najafi, M.H, ibid. p.10.

However, relations between the Ottomans and Najaf continuously deteriorated as a result. The tough Ottoman policies were met with an uprising in 1850, and again in 1852 the angry populace of the city expelled the Ottoman governor with his Ottoman forces out of Najaf.[73] Therefore, the precarious relationship between Najaf and the Turks became further shaky despite the call for jihad by Najafi '*ulama* of in 1914/15 against the British. Soon the defeated Turks turned their anger towards the deserters who gathered in Najaf. The Ottoman governor, Bahjet *Beg* had worsened the situation when he ordered his soldiers to search every house in Najaf. This insulting behavior instigated the sentiments of grievance in the city, and on 8 Rajab 1333 /April 1915, Najafis compelled the Turkish force to retreat after three days of fighting. From this date, Najaf claimed its semi independence. This uprising also urged other cities (Karbala, Hilla) to follow suit. The leaders of the four quarters of Najaf agreed to form a local government presided over by Sayyed Kadhim al-Yazdi. These four leaders or Shaikhs 'had authority respectively over the four quarters into which Najaf is divided, Sayyed Mahdi ruling the Huwaish quarter, Haj 'Atiyya the 'Amarah, Kadhim Subi the Buraq and Haj Sa'ad the Mishraq'.[74] The local government took charge of running Najaf's internal affairs such as collecting taxes, keeping order, solving disputes and so on. Najaf's local government survived until 1918 when the city was reoccupied by British forces.

Obviously, Najaf for centuries enjoyed a great deal of semi-autonomy within Iraq. This position affected and was reflected in its theological view, and political standing, let alone its local nature. Najaf's location on the edge of the desert coupled with its removed position from the central government bred the sense of self-autonomy among

[73] Al-Turihi, M K, ibid, p.253
[74] India Office, *Review of the civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, Great Britain, 1920, p.29; al-Asadi, H, *Thaurat al-Najaf 'ala al-Ingliz au al-Shararat al ula li-Thaurat al-'Shrin*, Baghdad, 1975, p.93; Al-Nifisi, A, *Dour al-Shi'a fi Tatdawer al-Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadeeth* , Beirut, 1973, pp.85-91; Atiyyah, G, *Iraq, 1908-1921: A Socio-Political Study*, Beirut, 1973, p.80.

its residents. No doubt, Najaf's self-autonomy has grown gradually, yet deeply, throughout the preceding centuries particularly in the absence of a strong central national government. Not surprising, this even reflected in the design of Najaf itself, starting from its outer wall that reinforced the sense of isolation to the inner structure of its houses, which has always been distinguished by the existence of a cellar *Sardab*, in the way that expresses privacy, secrecy and isolation.[75]

Shi'a creed itself might account for consolidating the sense of autonomy in Najaf, the home of Shi'ism. Giving no legitimacy for any temporal authority, Shi'a thought seems to have provided a fertile ground for feelings of discontent and dissatisfactions towards political authorities whatever they are. Subsequently, future events will reflect and deepen the sense of autonomy within the city. This phase demonstrated itself in Najaf's revolt of 1918 against British forces as well as its leading role in the Iraqi Revolution of 1920 as we shall see in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Najaf has two histories: imagined and real. The conceived is undefined and refers backs to the early ages of humanity linking the 'sacred land' with prophets and sacred events. The real history, however, accurately locates its relative position within the pre-Islamic period. In reality, Najaf established itself first as a holy place for Shi'a faithful, housing Imam 'Ali's Grave. This moment signifies the real birth of the sacred Najaf, which will determine its future prospect. Later on, the small city became the main Shi'a learning centre, expanding its religious reputation as the heart of the Shi'a world.

Najaf occupied a central political role first as a mediator between the Persian rulers and their Ottoman rivals and later on as a main broker for Iraqi Shi'is. This position gained

[75] *Sardab* in origin is a Persian word for what look like a tier or tiers of cellars inside houses in Najaf. About Sardab in Najaf and its importance, see for example, Thomas Lyell, *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia (Iraq and Imperialism)* with an introduction by Paul, Rich, Cambridge, England, 1991, pp. 29-30. See also al-Turihi, M K, ibid p.50.

grounds as Shi'i '*ulama* represented themselves as the sole leaders of Shi'a community in Iraq. As a stronghold of Shi'ism and the centre of *marja'iyya*; Najaf thus had been a balancing-power for the central authority of the Ottomans, British and then the Iraqi national governments throughout the monarchy period.

A combination of the sentiments of exclusion, discontent and independence gained deep roots in Najaf's soil that gave rise to religious objections and political protests. Moreover, Najaf's status would be further enhanced by its participation in the Iranian turmoil and its religio-political role in supporting Arab countries (Libya, for example), during the late 19th and early 20th century. This situation continued well into the early 1920s with Najaf leading the task of confronting the British policy in Iraq.

Chapter II

Transformation of social classes and pre-modern political landscape

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, Najaf was laid down solely on a religious basis. Consequently, religious factor, more than anything else, has shaped to a great extent the nature of social classes in Najaf, its economic activities and later on its political role. The religious aspect, however, denotes not only to the location of the Holy Shrine of Imam ‘Ali but includes also its *hawza*. It is certainly true to say that the history of Najaf encompass both the history of the Holy Shrine and its *hawza*.

Thus, I shall follow in this chapter the developments of social classes in Najaf by focusing on its two distinguishing symbols; the Holy Shrine and *hawza*. By doing so, we will see how different sectors and classes in the city have relied in their formation upon one of these two centres in one or another way. We shall consider also the implications of political as well as economic development on forging and constructing the inner shape of social structure in Najaf. Najaf's political role will be evaluated through tracing *‘ulama*'s role in the Tobacco crisis of 1891, the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and finally the 1920 Iraqi Revolution.

Najaf society: social classes and status

In December 1918, the British political general in Shamaya organized a meeting between Arnold Wilson, the British Acting Civil Commissioner of Iraq, and the notables of Najaf and Shamaya. The meeting was attended by ‘*ulama*, *Sadha*, tribal Shaikhs, merchants, poets, scholars and the Naqib al-Ashraf of Najaf. The British Administrator was keenly interested to hear the attendees' views about the future government of Iraq and this meeting underlines that the British were aware of Najaf's

decisive role in articulating the opinion of the Shi'a majority.[76] Those who attended the meeting undoubtedly represented the leading forces in Najaf and the mid-Euphrates region in general. Further, their composition reflected Najaf's religious, economic and social conditions, which contributed in shaping its own distinct community.

Batatu accurately states that

'The social structures of the various towns or regions, though possessing common features, differed according to differences in their historical functions or in their natural circumstances. Obviously, the social character of a purely tribal market town, like Suq-ush-Shuyukh, diverged markedly from that of a Shi'i holy city and a centre of pilgrimage, Najaf, or from that of Baghdad which had long been a main seat of government and a commercial emporium of international significance. Thus at Najaf the *sadin* or keeper of the 'Alid sanctuary was the city's richest man and at the same time its absolute ruler, whereas in Suq-ush-Shuyukh power tended to be in the hands of one or the other of its chief merchants who were Shaikhs or from sheikhly families and grew wealthy from their traffic in goods seized from caravans'.[77]

However, whereas it is true to talk of Najaf of two distinct classes during the 18th and 19th centuries, as a community of *mulla'iyya* (clergymen) and *mushahda* (Najafis),[78] this classification seems to be over- simplistic and neglects the developments that affected Najaf's community at the turn of the 20th century. Najaf in particular represents a good example of how social classes have been molded by social values, political transformations and economic changes and how social classes shaped a city.

Weber has proposed a differentiation between social class and social status:

'Status groups are characteristically social collectivities of a communal nature, which require the reproduction of a typical lifestyle and cultural inheritance. By contrast, economic classes are

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[76] See al-Basir, M M, *Tarikh al-Qadhayya al-'Iraqayya*, London, 1990, Chapter 9; al-Hasani, *al-Thoura al-Iraqia al-Koubra*, Seidon-1972, p.42; Atiyyah, G, p.272; Nakash, Y, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, p.62; al-Nifisi, p.119.

[77] Batatu, H, Class Analysis and Iraqi Society, *ASQ*, vol.1.No.3 p.235.

[78] Al-Wardi, *Lamahat 'Ijtima'iyya*, vol, 4, pp.407-409. See also Zubaida, the Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq, *IJMES*, 34 (2002), p.208.

merely aggregates of individuals linked together by exchange or other economic relations'.[79]

Weber stresses, however, that 'wealth is not the only criterion by which a person could gain social power and influence'. In traditional or pre-modern societies, 'prestige through education or descent was more significant than power based upon the ownership of the means of production'.[80] Most significantly, in a tradition community, 'the standing or status of the person depends not upon what they happen to own, but upon what they are as defined in legal or cultural terms. What a person does (for a living) is less significant socially than what he is (in terms of birth). A person's standing in the community is defined by whether they have honor, not by whether they have money. A person's honor depends upon birth, membership of particular families, education and training in appropriate cultural patterns, and the acquisition of respected and respectful attitudes and disposition'.[81]

Accordingly, I classify *sadin*, *sadah* and tribal Shaikh as social status. On contrary to this group, we recognize *'ulama*, merchants and *effendis* by their shared single feature: that is gaining positions through personal achievement. If social class results from resources available to a person (money, education, generosity and bravery), status is defined by sole inherited privileges. In a traditional society like Najaf, where classes are not determined sharply by financial resources, inherited lineage is certainly highly rated. While there is no room for mutation in status (to become *Sayyed* or tribal *Shaikh* for example), mobilization and movement could be sought and achieved in social classes. No doubt, individuals could move from the lower strata to become a *mujtahid* or a doctor, earning a new social position through education. Bravery or courage could also mobilize a person from a humble social position to become a *Shaikh*, a chief of quarter

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[79] Turner, S, Bryan, *Status*, Open University Press, London-1988, p.7.
[80] Ibid. p.7
[81] Ibid p.20

or even a governor (‘Abbas al-Hadad and Abu Galal are two examples in this regard).[82]

Najaf: religious economy

Certainly, Najaf businesses and whole economic activities have always tied up with the Shrine and the *hawza* in one or another way. The Shrine, in particular, has provided the small city with more than just a sacred mosque. In fact, the Shrine is the vein of city’s life. From *Sayyed*, *Shaikhs* and privileged wealthy people down to the downtrodden all seem to have been depended on the Shrine.

Like other cities in the Islamic World, the mosque in Najaf occupies the heart of the city.[83] Unlike other mosques, however, the Mosque or Shrine of Imam ‘Ali is unique and represents more than just place for prayer and conducting religious rites. Over centuries, the Shrine has acquired a sanctified status especially among Shi’i Muslims. Hundreds of stories are related, associating the Shrine with miracles; blinds and sick people who were cured; the poor and frightened who found shelter and protection. Indeed, for Shi’i believers, ‘Ali’s Soul has always been present there and gives help for comers. Besides that, the Shrine functioned as a sacred space where local disputes are settled, oaths and binding commitments are sworn and alliances between different factions recognized. Until recently, some people insist on signing their contract inside the Shrine, followed by specific pledges. No one dares to swear an oath falsely as they believe committing such a sin will incur the wrath of the Imam.[84]

Thanks to the Shrine as well as of the Shrine of Imam Hussain in Karbala, the pilgrim’s expenditure had been an important balancing item between Iraq and Iran. In other words, while Iraq’s exports to Iran have always been less than its imports from it, the

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[82] Peter Heine, *Zghurt and Shmurt: Aspects of the Traditional Shi’i Society*, p. 43, (36-44) in Jabar, F*, Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologies, State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq.* London, Saqi Books, 2002.

[83] For more details about the structure of the Islamic city, see Insoll, T, *The Archeology of Islam*, Oxford-1999, pp.202-10.

[84] For good explanation, see Insoll, T, ibid, pp.183-5. For stories, see al-Mijlisi, M, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Beirut, 1983, vol, 27, pp226-396 & vol.42.pp.315-24, 332-7; al-Dujaili, J, *Musua’at al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, vol.2.p.166, pp.205-13.

expenditure of the Shi'a Iranian pilgrims to the Shi'a holy cities are a 'very large credit item'.[85] For example, expenditure of the Iranian pilgrims amounted to £100,000 in 1800, increased in 1840 at £120,000 and reached over £1 million in 1875. The importance of the Iranian's expenditure was still very high even when the Iranian governments often tried sometimes to divert the attention of Iranian people to Qum and Meshhad. Until recently, the visitation of Imam 'Ali Shrine has almost been the only commodity that Najaf can offer.

Najaf has relied upon another religio-economic activity linked closely to Imam 'Ali's Grave; that is funeral burial. Najaf, according to the Shi'a traditions, is regarded as the blessed burial place for the Shi'a faithful. Shi'i believers who are buried near Imam 'Ali, the Shi'a belief maintains, would enjoy his intercession.[86] This tradition, of course, has brought both money and dead bodies to the holy city. A few Najafi families monopolized the business of burial and became specialists. Albu Subi family, for instance, has specialized in this profession and their name connected with monopolizing of this job. Corpses are usually carried from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, the Gulf (Bahrain and Kuwait in particular) and from inside Iraq to *Wadi as-Salam* (the Valley of Peace), the largest cemetery in the world where they find their rest.[87]

Other economic activities have also flourished in the city. As a home of Imam 'Ali's Grave and the main *hawza* centre, thousands of small businesses and professions have been created, offering jobs for dwellers. For this reason, Najaf has always been an attractive destination for Iraqis from other cities and for Shi'is coming from around the world. Thus, while the great waves of Iranian immigrants who came to the city during

[85] Issawi, C, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914, A Documentary Economic History*, Oxford University Press, p.135. For more details about the importance of visitation, see for example, Hollister, John, Norman, *the Shi'a of India*, London, 1953, pp.51-52; Nakash, Y, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, ibid, pp.163-83.

[86] Al-Mijlisi, M, *Bihar*, ibid, vol, 27.pp.227-34; al-Dujaili, J, ibid, vol.1.pp.367-8, pp.413-20; Mahbuba, *Madhi al-Najaf wa Hadheraha*, Najaf, vol, 1, ibid.pp.14-5.

[87] See al-Dujaili, J, ibid, vol, 1, p366, p.400, pp.420-33; al-Hakim, H, *al-Mufasal*, ibid, vol, 3, pp.143-56, pp.199-201; Nakash, Y, ibid, pp.184-92.

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries changed Najaf demographically, the location of the city itself as the centre of religious learning and pilgrimage brought in people from inside and outside Iraq to take Najaf as a permanent abode. Subsequently, in addition to the Arabs, who constituted the core of Najaf's inhabitants, thousands of Iranians, Indians, Lebanese and Afghans and from other parts of Muslim and Arab territories became part of its people.[88] In 1895, there were some 33,000 Iranian and other Asians in Iraq, almost all in the Shi'i Holy Cities of Karbala and Najaf.[89] However, the number of foreigners in Najaf dropped steadily in the 1930s, reaching to thirteen thousands, which constituted over the third of Najaf population. Iranians formed the bulk of the foreign community.[90] Political tension between Iraq and Iran seemingly contributed to this marked drop. The number of Iranian continued in decline during the next two decades mainly because of the revival of *hawza* studies in Qum especially after the demise of Sayyed Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani in Najaf in 1947.[91]

Transformation of religious authority in Najaf

Economic activities have shaped to a great extent the nature of religious authority in Najaf. This applies perfectly to the position of *sadin*, who was once considered the most powerful and respected man in the city and who lost gradually this role to the great *Mujtahids*. In fact, the position of *sadin* or *Naqib al-Ashraf* has been one of the attributes of the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala and Kadhamayya. Yet the very concept in itself is old and associated with the existence of the sacred mosques and places in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. As we noted, Ibn Battuta spoke of *Naqib al-Ashraf* as the 'sole' governor of Najaf (chapter one). This description was still valid until the beginning of the 20th century though the role of what has become to be known as 'the

[88] Wida'a, N, *Lamahat min Tarikh al-Najaf*, Najaf-1973, vol.1.p.23.
[89] Foreign Office, *Mesopotamia*, Great Britain, pp. 11-12. See also Chapter one about how the great wave of Iranian immigrants in the 18th century changed the demographic structure of Najaf.
[90] Al-Janabi, A, *Tarikh al-Najaf al-Ijtimai 1932-1968*, Baghdad-2010.pp.217-19.
[91] Al-Janabi, A, ibid, p.222.

custodian' has been affected greatly as a result of the gradual centralization of authority in Iraq.

Between 656/1258 (the Mongol era) and the re-occupation of Najaf in 1843 by Ottomans, *Naqib al-Ashraf* was the sole administrator of Najaf. Primarily, *Naqabat al-Ashraf* was founded first during the Abbasid era.[92] It was only later (the Buwayid dynasty) that *sadanah* was established as a new position, linked directly to *Naqib al-Ashraf*, who was responsible for designating the *sadin* himself.[93]Although *Naqib al-Ashraf* was the most powerful man among this body, *Naqabat al-Ashraf* had been established as an institution, composed of several people. *Naqib al-Ashraf* nonetheless combined the financial affairs, judiciary (*qadha*) and administration of the Hajj (pilgrimage). What is certain however that *Naqabat al-Ashraf* whether in Mecca, Najaf or other holy cities has always been an inherited position, confined to the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Considering the significance of this position in terms of financial privileges and personal esteem, it has always been a source of harsh content and envies among the *sadah* themselves. Nevertheless, while the custodian has benefited considerably from this transformation, at least financially, his position became virtually more vulnerable and accountable to the central power of Baghdad. This gives an explanation, for example, for the bid of al-Rufa'ai family in 1877-78, who were voluntarily or reluctantly complied to pay the Ottoman governor in Baghdad £10,000 in order to keep their position as custodians. Such huge amounts of money indicate undoubtedly the solid financial base enjoyed by the custodian and his extensive power in the city.[94]

By the beginning of the 19th century, however, the real power shifted from *Naqib al-Ashraf* to the *sadin* (custodian), who became *de facto* administrator of the city. Owing

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[92] Al-Joboori, K, Naqabat al-Ashraf fi al-Najaf, *Al-Dhakher*, No.13-14-2003.pp.67-114.
[93] Hirz-ul-Din.M, *Tarikh Al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Qum-1427 H, vol.1pp.221-4
[94] Litvak, M, ibid, p.157; al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid, vol, 3, p.68.

to the fact that *sadin* or the *Killidar* (a Persian word denoting to the *Naqib* and recently became more popular referring specifically to the branch of al-Rufa'ai *sadah* family) has turned into the government hand, the position became liable to bidding and speculation. No wonder, the *Killidar* power brought to the minimum with limited responsibility over administration of the Holy Shrine. Subsequently, the *Killidar* has kept part of his administrative role but lost completely his religious authority upon the city. The *Killidarship*, thus, has become more concerned with satisfying the central government as the position 'was considered as a gift from the government. Thus, it provided the authorities with a lever upon which to exert their influence, and sometimes Ottoman officials simply offered the position to the highest bidder among their supporters'.[95]

At any rate, *Killidar* has always enjoyed the reputation of being one of the wealthiest if not the richest one in the city. It has been said that *al Sama la Allah wal gaaa le Sayyed Jawad* (the heaven for God and the earth for Sayyed Jawad), the statement that illustrates the sound financial power of the *sadin* in general.[96] With the tightening of the central authority in Baghdad and the gradual erosion of this position, the wealthy family turned its interests towards new trajectories. It is not by accident that a good number of the Rufa'ai family members started to pay their attention to new political activities thanks to both earned financial resources and obtained education.

The *sadin* or *Killidar* is one member of a large segment of Najaf's community; that is *sadah*. Evidently, *sadah* constitute a distinct and important group in Iraq in general. Basically, *sadah* base their status on the claim of their belonging to the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad through 'Ali and Fatima. Although there are some common features among all Arab and Islamic societies concerning the status of *sadah* or Al-

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[95] F.O.371/2135/61426, Confidential, *Summary of events in Turkish 'Iraq for the months June and July, 1914*, The British Consul-General, Baghdad in 'Atiyyah, G, ibid. p.47

[96] Personal interview with R, Killidar, London, 20/04/2002. For more details about *sadin*, see Mahbuba, vol, 1, pp. 258-319.

Ashraf as they call them in some Arab countries, North Africa for example, Shi'a society in particular confer on them a great deal of respect, reverence and honor accompanied by varied types of privileges. As a sign of respect, Iraqi people particularly in the Shi'a areas used to call them *Awlad al-Zahra* (Children of Fatima al-Zahra, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter).[97] Sayyed also may distinguish himself by wearing a black or green headscarf or belt.[98] Socially speaking, *sadah* have always been guaranteed the right to be an arbitrator among fighters or disputers. According to the Bedouin traditions, it is prohibited to steel from *sadah*. Any person who breaches this tradition will be obliged to remove from his area to another one. It is thought that any abuse directed to a *sayyed* will bring about accurse over this area. Most *sadah* prefer to marry only to their counterparts and it is very rare to find otherwise.[99]

Most significantly, *Sayyed* is entitled according to the Shi'a law to claim his religious due of *khums* (fifth) distributed by *marja'i at-taqlid*. Clearly, those who are close to *marja'i at-taqlid* often benefit from their relations better than those who are not. Jealousy and envy is expected in such realm between recipients and neglected or precisely between haves and have not. A good example of this kind of contention has been the one that associated with the Indian money or Oudha Bequest. Established in 1825 by Ghazi al-Din Haydar, the king of Oudha, this bequest was designed to be distributed among *mujtahids* in Najaf and Karbala. *Mujtahids*, in their turn, were licensed to give out money to '*ulama* and needy students.[100] At any rate, some *mujtahids* were accused of favoring their relatives of *sadah* and neglecting the real needy people. In Najaf in particular, *khums* money has often caused harsh criticism and anger among Najafis. Because of this special status awarded to the *sadah* among Shi'is

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[97] Shalhad, Y, *Buna al-Muqadas And al-Arab qabil al-Islam waba'dah*, Beirut, 1996, pp.127-8; Al-Wardi, *Dirasa fi Tabeeat al-Mujtama al-Iraqi*, pp.246-247.
[98] Atiyyah,G, ibid, p.46
[99] Saleem, S, M, *al-Chibayish, Dirasah Anthropologiya*, Baghdad, pp.150-3; al-Nafisi, ibid, p.43; Al-Wardi, ibid, p.246
[100] See about the Oudha Bequest, Litvak, M, A Failed Manipulation: the British, the Oudah Bequest and the Shi'i Ulama of Najaf and Karbala, *BJMES* (2000), 27(1), pp.69-89.

along with other correlated social, religious and financial privileges, doubt might be raised regarding authenticity of some claims.[101] This is true especially concerning some foreign students, who find themselves almost depending on stipends and donations.

Although *sadha* is certainly not a united class, including poor and rich, religious and tribal leaders, influential figures and ordinary people, it has nonetheless played a leading role in the Iraqi society. To better appreciate the significant role played by *sadah* in Shi'a society, it is enough to indicate the role of Sayyed Nur Sayyed Aziz Al-Yasiri, Sayyed Alwan al-Yasiri and Sayyed Hadi Zwain during the Iraqi Revolution of 1920 through their attachment with '*ulama* and *mujtahids*. Without their indispensable support, it was unimaginable to declare the jihad campaign in 1916 and 1920.[102]

The great esteem and status attached to *sadah* came under attack throughout 1930s up until the takeover of 1958. It is possible, therefore, to speak of major change in the status of *sadah* during the monarchy period. As mentioned earlier, the reputation of Sayyed Nur al-Yasiri has made him a saint-like person among the tribesmen. People in the Mid-Euphrates and the South alike even accustomed to swear by *sadah* names. After the Revolution of 1958, however this deference and high stutus appears to have been undermined. Sayyed Muhsin Abu Tabikh, an influential figure from the Mid-Euphrates, related that he was approached after the 1958 Revolution by someone, asking him: you still alive? We thought that the Revolution finished you forever?[103] This changing mood towards *sadah* might be explained in the light of the benefits and advantages awarded to them and most importantly their representation in the Iraqi regime under the monarchy; hence they were treated as part of the 'corrupted establishment'. No doubt, some of *sadah* were among the wealthiest landowners, the

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[101] Personal's author experience. Najafi people accuse some Iranians of claiming *Sadah* linage for benefiting. They call them *Sadat Youm al-Jama'a* (Sadah of Friday Day). There is claim that some Iranian may claim to be Sayyed as they were borne on Friday.

[102] Batatu, H, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 153- 210; Atiyyah, G, ibid, p.347.

[103] Basri, Mir, *Alam al-Watanya wa al-Qawmya al-Arabaya*, London, Dar al-Hikma, 1999, p.297& p.304

fact that made them subjects of harsh criticisms of their folk.[104]

No less important, had been the discernable interest shown by *sadah* in political activities. As we shall see, a good deal of the leading and enlightened nationalist and Communist figures originated from *sadah* families, the phenomenon that signaled their partial rebellion against the old system. Batatu has noted that 'no fewer than 32 percent of the entire membership of the Communist Central Committees in the period 1955-1963 were descendants of *sadah* of moderate and from small provincial towns whose old economies had been depressed through forces flowing from the subordination of Iraq to the international market'.[105] Obviously, the presence of *sadah* at the top of the Communist Party in Iraq has been a further catalyst to attract ordinary people, especially among Shi'is, to join the party. Interestingly enough, the old form of saint-like *sayyed* with his spiritual and moral characters, has given away to a new *effendi* politicized sayyed armed with new ideological ideas to address different expectations.

Unlike *sadah*, who defined and defended their claim exclusively through their lineage, tribal *Shaikhs* have built their status on a mix of merits and characteristics notably lineage, wealth, courage, generosity and so on. Actually, *Shaikhs* played a leading and decisive role in the Iraqi society throughout the Ottoman rule. Realizing their scope of influence, the Ottoman thus allocated huge lands to tribal *Shaikhs*, giving them the right to collect taxes in an attempt to induce them to their side.[106] Likewise, the British were interested in placating tribal *Shaikhs* and this policy had become more urgent after the 1920 as the British realized the considerable role played by *Shaikhs* in the 1920 Revolution. By creating a special and separate legal system for the tribes (the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation of 1916, which was incorporated into the Iraqi constitution in 1925), the British sought to bolster the power of these *Shaikhs*. The

[104] See for example, al-Wardi, 'A, *Tabeeat al-Mujtamaa al-Iraqi*, ibid, pp.201-2, 247
[105] Batatu, H, Class Analysis, ibid, p.239
[106] India Office, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, London-3rd December 1920.p.31.

British administration also enhanced its position through appointing loyal individuals to conduct political and tax levying powers in the tribal areas. But the most important measure used by the British and the Iraqi government under mandate to control the power of the tribal *Shaikhs* had been the distribution of land. Land, according to Tripp, 'was the reward for influence and power…For the authorities, therefore, it was a way of purchasing social order'.[107] This combination of policies has wielded the tribal *Shaikhs* strong position vis-à-vis the state, the situation that lasted in force until the Revolution of 1958. Throughout supporting the powers of the *Shaikhs*, the British and likewise the Iraqi government succeeded in separating the tribal *Shaikhs* from their public base, the '*ulama* and *marja'iyya*. Admittedly, strengthening tribal *Shaikhs* in terms of financial sources and political weight have been at the expense of their virtual social identity and solidarity. Evidently, the split between the tribal *Shaikhs* and *mujtahids* manifested itself following the latter's return from Iran in 1924 and especially after the failure of the tribal upheavals in 1930s.[108]

It should be stressed, however, that distribution of land in the Mid-Euphrates did not affect peasants in the way that happened in the southern regions. This provides some clues in explaining the reasons behind the peasant's mass immigration especially to Baghdad from the south, where the large land tenures concentrated the phenomena that did not take place in the Middle Euphrates. This also explains why the Iraqi Communist Party has attracted a good number of peasantry from the south comparing with its limited success among their counterpart in the Middle Euphrates.[109]

Between 1921 and 1958, the tribal *Shaikhs* formed a crucial powerful group along with their armed followers. Thus, rival statesmen and political parties in Baghdad restored to these tribal *Shaikhs* because of their potential influence. As Iraqi politicians had engaged in an open bargain and fight against each other, they utilized these *Shaikhs* as part of their political means. Yasin al-Hashemi (1884-1937) and Rashid 'Ali al-Kailani (1892-1965) are two examples of Iraqi politician who did not hesitate from using

[107] Tripp, C, *A History of* Iraq, ibid, p.51. See also Salman, K.A, *The Ottoman and British Policies towards Iraqi Tribes 1831 to 1920*, PhD Dissertation, University of Utah, 1992, chapter.7.pp.259-290.
[108] Sluglett, P, *Britain in Iraq*, ibid, pp.56 &161-181; Marr, P, *The Modern History of Iraq*, pp.40-42; Nakash, Y, ibid, pp.90-91
[109] Sluglett, F & Sluglett, P, *Iraq since 1958*, ibid, p.12.

the card of tribal *Shaikhs* against their opponent.[110] The Shi'a tribal threat, however, had been neutralized gradually as the Iraqi state incorporated *Shaikhs* within the regime whether by financial rewards or through integrating them into the political system as clients of Baghdad politicians. Supremacy of the Iraqi army, too weakened tribal threat and put an end for any armed attempt particularly after 1936.[111] The tribal factor almost lost its effect after 1958 for the next thirty years only to be revived again at the hands of Saddam Hussain in the end of 1980s.[112]

Najaf and Mecca: sacred location and mercantile station

Holy places have always been important trade markets. The residents of Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem, for this reason, have benefited from the locations of their cities to emerge as mediators and merchants with strong financial bases. As we mentioned earlier, Ibn Batuta has noticed in his book that the inhabitants of Najaf had enjoyed a good reputation of being respected and good merchants. Najaf has undoubtedly profited from its location on the pilgrimage route to Mecca to grow up as a trade station for the pilgrims. As we stated earlier, the Pilgrim Route or *Darb Zubaida* (Route of Zubaida) to Mecca had been used by Muslim merchants and pilgrims alike. It is thought that Arab traders traveled across this way even before Islam.[113] Since then up until the beginning of the 20th century, the Najaf-Mecca route had been still in motion. Pilgrims also had to use this route in their risky and difficult journey to Mecca. Pilgrims who often spent several days in Najaf for visiting Imam 'Ali and perhaps to reload their caravans, have given Najaf some financial impetus.[114]

As a neighbour of Shamar, one of the biggest Arab Bedouin tribes, Najafi merchants

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[110]See for example, al-Hassani, Salim, *Rouasa al-Iraq 1920-1958*, London, 1992, pp.89-95& 220-221, al-Dujaili, *Mousoa'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, vol, 4, Beirut, 1994, pp.332338

[111] Al-Nasiri, 'A, *al-Jaysh wal-Saltah fil Iraq al-Malaki 1921-1958*, Damascus-2000, pp.67-76, pp.90-1; Sluglett, P, *Britain in Iraq*, ibid, ch.7.pp.182-92; Dodge, T, *Inventing Iraq*, ibid.ch.7.pp.131-56.

[112] Bengio, O, Nation Building in Multiethnic Societies: The Case of Iraq, p.162-5, ibid.

[113] Al-Mudhafar, M, A, *Medinat al-Najaf al-Kubra*, MA dissertation submitted to the University of Baghdad, 1975, p.42; Naval Intelligence Division: *Iraq and the Persian Gulf September 1944, Geographical Handbook Series*, p.546, London. Zubaida was the wife of the 'Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid.

[114] J, G, Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, vol, 5.p.2302; Simpich, F, Mystic Nedjef, the Shia Mecca, *the National Geographic Magazine*,vol,XXVI,No.6, December 1914.pp.589-98.

have built strong ties, attracting Shamar and other tribes from surroundings areas to come to Najaf, ‘where they exchange Syrian goods for the grain and dates of the Euphrates’.[115] Najafi merchants have cooperated with these Bedouin tribes in providing security for the trading caravans. Once they enter the desert, these tribes take the responsibility of guiding the caravans safely to al-Hira, the predecessor of both Kufa and Najaf.[116] Al-Shibibi has observed that Najafi merchants had had their own trade base until the beginning of the 20th century, wherefrom they extended their trading deals to cover the whole Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, Najafi merchants have sustained their connections with Al Rashid in Najid through marriage. Apparently, Najafi merchants formed a distinct group in both Najid and Hijaz and this community had conducted its business in Hail and Medina even after the World War I. Najafi merchants had consolidated their business with the Arabian Peninsula tribes until the fall of Hail by the hands of Al Saud.[117] Losing the traditional link with the Bedouin tribes of the today Saudi Arabia coupled with changing in technology and transportation, contributed in shifting the interest from this route to other new destinations.

This transformation, however did not affect Najaf's position as the main market for domestic trade and Najafi merchants exploited further the city central location in the Mid-Euphrates to lead retail trade in this area. Thus, Najafi families like Al Marza, Al al-Haboobi and Al Shukur have emerged as very powerful businessmen in the city with Muhsin Shlash as the most active and influential one.[118]

Najaf, on the other hand, functioned throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries up to the beginning of the 20th century as the principal traffic trade centre connecting between Damascus with Baghdad. It was estimated in the late 18th century that ‘two or

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[115] Atiyyah, G, ibid, p.47.
[116] Musil, A, *Northern Negd*, New York, AMS Press, 1928, p.205
[117] Al-Shibibi, M, Rahla fi Badyat al-Samawah, pp.1-33, *Majalat al-Majma'a al-A'lmi il'-Iraqi*, vol, 11, 1964, pp.2-3. See also, al-Asadi, H, *Thawrat al-Najaf*. ibid. p.143
[118] Al-Shibibi, M, ibid.p.3.

three caravans a year passed between Damascus and Baghdad, while in the early 19th century it is reported that four caravans left Aleppo annually for the principal towns of Iraq and Anatolia and two for Persia via Baghdad'.[119]

Working as mediators between Baghdad and Iran from one hand, the Arabian Peninsula and Syria, on the other, the Najafi merchants have gained good profits.[120] The American Consul in Baghdad reported in 1913 that 'approximately 30,000 camel loads were shipped' for both Najaf and Karbala.[121] This route, in particular has supported a related business; that is building *khans* and lodges for traders, pilgrims and travelers. Thus several *khans* were founded along this route to provide rest, housing and food for its guests. *Khans* were built to be distanced from each other between two to four hours as the long journey between Baghdad and Najaf requires several days. Lorremer noticed that three big *khans* had been built between Karbala and Najaf to provide food and accommodation for merchants and pilgrims. One of these *khans*, for instance, had the capacity to host at one time over one thousand men and feed five hundred horses.[122]

In addition to providing the city with good financial sources, business trade also contributed in creating various types of jobs and encouraged local small factories. A range of crafts has benefited from the location of Najaf. Small manufactories such as fine silk mantles, pottery and jewellery were dependent to a great extent on the movement of traders and closely linked with religious activities like visitation and so forth. Najafi craftsmen and artisans have founded their guilds and networks, which are characterized by its traditions and costumes. Groups of the same profession gathered to establish guilds according to their business. The crucial importance of these guilds lies

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[119] Roger, O, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, London, 1993.pp.53-54.
[120]Hamadah, S, *the Economic System in Iraq*, Beirut, 1938.pp305-307, 377-378. See also al-Samarie. S. A, *Muqadema fi al-Tarekh al-'Aqtesadi il'Iraqi*, Najaf, 1973. pp.23-24
[121] From a memorandum by U.S. Consul in Baghdad, 23 July 1913 emended by letter of 9 August 1913, in Issawi, C, ibid. p. 266.
[122]Al-Hamdani, T, N, *Malamih Saiasya wa Hadhariya fi Tarikh il'Iraq al-Hadeeth wa al-Moaser*, Beirut, 1989, pp. 164-165. See also Musil, A, *The Middle Euphrates*, New York, 1927, pp.37-39.

in its role as an organized association charged with preparation for religious ceremonies such as *ta'ziya* (the mourning gatherings), *tatbeer* (cutting foreheads with sword) and *zinjil* (flagellation) and so on. The mourning processions in Najaf, for example, were also known as the 'processions of the crafts' (*mawakib al-asnaf*). Members of the various professions in the city, as well as the religious students, the servants in the shrine, and the *sayyids*, used to parade in groups, each formed according to the unique class and professional affiliations of the participants'.[123] According to al-Turjeman, each group of specific occupation had to form its *majlis*. For this purpose, they select one man or two to administer their affairs. This person, who is chosen according to his reputation, would be in charge for bringing *mumin* (preacher or lecturer) and a *radood* (for eulogy recitation).[124] Professional guilds brought together craftsmen and artisans under one umbrella and provided an added link among Najafis, enhancing the sense of solidarity and unity. It worked as an obvious space for expressing and sharing views to reach decisions especially in critical moments. Like Najaf quarter, guilds provided its members with a shared identity and belonging. The importance of Najafi quarter, howevre, is not limited to the housing of its residents but further beyond to provide them with protection and even support in their political activities though their activities and thoughts 'may not be generally shared, but which fit in with its general ethos'.[125]

Najafis have expressed their allegiance for quarters via one of two ways: supporting their quarter's fellows in their social and political activities and taking part in the annual commemoration of 'Ashura. As each quarter in Najaf had its *mawkib* (procession) that show the solidarity of this quarter, thus every person would be expected to partake in

[123] Nakash, Y, ibid. p.152. See also al-Sharqi, T, *Al-Najaf al-Ashraf... 'Adatuha wa Taqaliduha*, Najaf-1978, p.217; al-Haydari, I, *Tragedya Karbala*, pp.432-445. See also about the role of guilds in social life, Lewis, B, The Islamic Guilds in the Middle East, *AA*, vol, XXXVII.pp.462-65.

[124] Al-Turjeman, A, *al-Mawakib al-Hussainayya fi al-Najaf* (unpublished book), p.37 and after; Al-Haydari, I, ibid, pp. 441-2. Compare also with Indian Shi'a rituals, Pinault, D, *The Shiites. Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, I.B.Tauris-London-1992, pp.83-98.

[125] Zubaida, S, (1993) *Islam, the People & the State. Political Ideas & Movements in the Middle East*, I.B.Tauris-London, p.97

the memorial services (*majalis al-ta'ziya*), which were organized by his quarter. This may include participating in the flagellation in the tenth day of 'Ashura, which implies partly a force parade of his quarter. Person's enthusiasm and fanaticism for his quarter reaches its climax at the annual rituals of 'Ashura and the visitation of Imam Hussain's tomb in the fortieth day (*al-'Arbaniyya*).[126]

While ethnic division has been less clear among craftsmen and artisans, it is possible to discern some patterns however. Arab families, in general, have deserted manual crafts save silk mantles, which are associated with camels, and hence with Bedouin traditions. Also Arab families (see above) controlled all death-related businesses (burial and so on) and considered them blessed jobs. The negative attitude shown by the Arabs towards manual work might be explained in the light of the old and deep-seated tradition of the Arab tribes. Deserted as a mean job undermine man's status within his community, this apathetic attitude towards manual crafts has been in effect inherited from the pre-Islamic period and still common among Arab people until today.[127]

Many of these traditional crafts lost its values as it became under the increasing effect of the cheap European products. For this reason, local handicraft production has decayed in the whole of Iraq. Whereas in the first half of the 19th century in Baghdad alone there were 12,000 looms, by the beginning of the 20th century the number had shrunk to a few hundred.[128] This may gives some explanation for the future political trajectory manifested by some Najafi groups, for instances the strong appeal of the Communist movement to the owners and workers of silk mantles as this group was among the most affected by modern technology.[129]

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[126] Al-Turjeman, A, ibid, p.62, also see al-Haydari, I, ibid. pp.103-137; Nakash,Y, ibid. pp.142-154

[127]Amin, A, *Fajrul al-Islam*, Beirut, al-Maktabat al-Asrayah, 2008, pp.21, 92 &169; al-Douri, A A, *Maqadimah fi Tarikh Sadr al-Islam,* Beirut-1984, p.30 &pp.87-8.

[128] Issawi, C, ibid, p.397; Salman, H, ibid, p.355.

[129] See chapter three

Hawza and the challenge of modern school

Hawza has been the traditional home of Shi'a learning for a millennium. Since Shaikh al-Tusi, Najaf has continued to be one of the most authoritative centres of Shi'a religious learning. Importantly, the *hawza*'s learning system also remained largely intact until the turn of the 20th century. The introduction of modern school, however, has raised questions concerning the whole system.

The learning system in *hawza* is often divided into three main stages: *Maqaddamat* (preliminary), *As-Sutuh* (externals) and *Bahth al-Kharij* (higher level). In each of these levels, student is expected to complete studying in some set texts before he moves to the next higher level. While emphasis is placed on Arabic sciences (Arabic Syntax, Grammars and Rhetoric) in the first stage (especially for non-Arab students), next level emphasis on *fiqh*, *usul al-fiqh*, Quran, Tradition Sciences (*Hadith*) and logic as well as philosophy. But unlike in *Muqaddamat* lessons, where teaching almost always carried by senior students, *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* are taught mainly by *mujtahids*. Both levels completed in no less than ten years however. In *Dars* or *Bahth al-Kharij*, teaching takes another way, as there are no specific text books to be studied by the student; it is left for *mujtahids* themselves to decide the way of teaching. *Mujtahids*, who focus in this level specifically on *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, often start with reviewing the opinions of other scholars, exploring and criticizing them and finally giving their own opinion.[130]

Hawza's system, however, has had its defects and weakness. As there are no requirements or qualifications needed for enrolment, *hawza* has become a home of idol people who seek easy money. *Hawza*'s learning system also has been criticized for its old and outdated approach depending until recent times on medieval textbooks with no

[130] Bahr-ul 'Ulum, M, ibid, pp.9-110; Al-Asifi, M M, *Madrasat al-Najaf wa tatawer al-Harkat al-Islahaya fiha*, Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf, 1384 A.H, pp.7-13; Al-Mudhafar, M. R, Jama'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf, *Al-Azhar Magazine*, Part, 6, vol, 32, p. 605-7 (pp. 604-607), 1960; Momen, M, ibid, pp. 201-202.

due attention given to new approaches and educational methodologies. Furthermore, with no exams or tests to be taken by the student, it is almost difficult to asses the quality of *hawza*'s attendants. These and similar imperfections have made *hawza* studies under constant criticisms of *hawza's 'ulama* themselves as well as lay people.[131]

Indeed, *hawza*'s system put through serious attacks of modern secular school, political changes and fierce intellectual strife within Iraqi society. And this contributed in vital way in diminishing the reputation of religious studies and in discarding new students especially from Arab families. This warning sign manifested itself in the rapid decreasing number of religious students especially among Iraqis. While it was reported that there were more than ten thousands religious students in Najaf before 1920, less than three thousands students remained in Najaf by 1960s.[132]

According to Zaki Mubarak, who visited Najaf in 1930s, there had been a strong reformative current among the students of religious institutions similar to that one existed among the students of al-Azhar twenty-five years ago.[133] This tendency was motivated by the spread of secular education in Iraq and the new opportunities it opened for young people.

Reforming *hawza*

The decline of the *hawza's* traditional learning deeply alarmed *mujtahids*, who had realized since the beginning of 1920 the urgent need to look for new alternatives. Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita was a pioneer of this reformative current within Najaf's *hawza* as he drafted the first blueprint for new *hawza* in 1930. Kashif al-Ghita, who renovated an old building belonging to his family, intended to attract a new generation. Kashif al-Ghita has seemingly reflected his own personal concerns as he

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131 Al-Jamali, F, The Theological Colleges of Najaf, *MW*, vol, L (1960), pp.15-22.
132 Al-Amin, M, *Rihlat al-Sayyed Muhsin Al-Amin* , Beirut, 2nd edition, 1985, p. 106; Bahr-ul 'Ulum, M, ibid. p.83; al-Mudhafar, M R, ibid. 604. Also compare with; O'Connor, A G, Higher Education in Iraq, *The Muslim World*, vol. XLV111, 1958, No.1, pp136-147.
133 Al-Halali, A, R, *Zaki Mubarak in Iraq*, Beirut, 1969.p.227

found members of his close family more interested in secular rather than religious careers. Young people of well-known families like al-Shaikh Radhi, al-Jawahiri, Al-Sadr, Al-Shibibi and Kashif al-Ghita had increasingly abandoned Shi'a religious learning and sought civil institutions such as College of Law, College of Education and so on to become lawyers, teachers or even assistants in the Iraqi governmental body. Kashif al-Ghita's project, thus, was aimed at bringing back good quality education in *hawza* in the hope of reviving Shi'a seminarys. The attempt, however, bore no fruite as it almost copied the old *hawza* system with no genuine change.[134]

Shortly after that, Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar introduced a more comprehensive and modern project, which reflected undoubtedly the real pressures of modern era. Al-Mudhafar, who thought of his project as early as 1920, adopted a more practical and realistic approach.[135] For this purpose, al-Mudhafar prepared the grounds patiently for more than ten years, working privately and openly to sow the first seeds. Starting with good fundraising campaigns to secure financial, religious and social support, al-Mudhafar set up first in 1935 a society of religious intellectuals known as (*Muntada al-Nashr*), which in turn, founded a secondary class to teach Arabic, logic, jurisprudence and some other subjects. After an uneasy start, it developed to open new classes containing 150 students. The small project survived difficult times and went ahead with new requests from Basrah, Kadhamyya and Hilla to open similar schools.[136] This unexpected success encouraged al-Mudhafar to realize his dream, namely establishing a college of jurisprudence yet in new modern form. For this end, he worked continuously for several years with tens of persons who shared his intention and dream. After many private meetings and lengthily discussions, al-Mudhafar guaranteed the support of two hundred of '*ulama* and influential personals. In 1958, a faculty of jurisprudence

[134] Bahr-ul 'Ulum, M, ibid. pp.9-110.
[135] Muntadah al-Nashr, *Kulayat al-Fiqh fil al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Najaf-1960,pp.4-7.
[136] Al-Asifi, M M, *Madrasat al-Najaf wa Tatawer al-Harkat al-Islahaya fiha*, ibid, pp.104-7.

(*Kulaiyat Muntada al-Nashr*) opened and another high school followed in 1961, both of them recognized by the Ministry of Education.[137]

The project succeeded and this was evident from the number of students who registered themselves. More than 700 students attended the faculty along with the secondary and elementary schools in the mid 1960s.[138] The success of this project owes a lot to al-Mudhafar's dedicated efforts as well as for adopting a new educational methodology, which combined both modern civil education and old *hawza* system. Al-Mudhafar fully devoted himself to this project and he wrote new modern texts for principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqih),* logic and philosophy as well added new subjects to the curriculum of the college.[139]

Two striking things worth mentioning here about the people who led the reformation project within Najaf's *hawza*: Firstly, none of them was a *marja'i* although most of them were from the leading *mujtahids*. Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar and Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim, Ali Bahr-ul 'Ulum, Muhammad Jawad al-Hichami were the driving power behind this project. Secondly, the reformists all came from Arab families with only shy support of Sayyed Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani. This reflects, among other things, implicit tension between conservative, apolitical and non-intervention trend represented mainly by the Persian *mujtahids* and Arab *mujtahids* who led chiefly by Kashif al-Ghita, al-Mudhafar, 'Abdul Karim al-Jaza'eri and others. This divergence in attitudes, however, might be explained in the light of the transformation within the hierarchy of '*ulama* community. Apparently, the religious community within Najaf's *hawza* seems to have been passed through gradual reconstruction during the last two centuries.

[137] Al-Asifi, M M, ibid.p.107, p.129.
[138] Al-Asifi, ibid, pp. 106-115; Bahr-ul 'Ulum, M, ibid.pp.182-185; Nakash, Y, ibid. p.265.
[139] For more details, see al-Mudhafar's account in the recent publication, (editor) al-Qamousi, M. 'Min Awraq al-Shaikh al-Mudhafar', *Afaq Najafayya*, No.8, 2007, pp.129-70. See also, al-Asifi, ibid, pp.118-37.

Marja'iyya, Merchants and money

In spite of the fact that Shi'ism dates back to the early days of Islam, *marja'iyya* as a concept has only recently emerged. Indeed, the scholarly history of Shi'ism illustrates that the emergence of *marja'iyya*'s notion has been relatively new.[140] It seems that until the end of the 4th century, Twelver Shi'ism had a similar religious hierarchy to that of Sunni Muslims. In investigating the history of Shi'ism, no such institution existed though some modern views suggest otherwise.[141] It is certain that Shi'a sources speak of different institutions in the early stages of Shi'a communities in Kufa, Baghdad and Qum; that is *Naqabat al-Ashraf al-'Alwaieen* (Association of Honored 'Alid). As stated previously, this institution was specifically created for taking care of *sadha* affairs and had nothing to do with the whole affairs of Shi'a community.[142]

The occultation of the Twelfth Imam in 941 raised the social profile of Shi'i '*ulama* among Shi'a laypersons. Gradually and constantly, the Shi'i '*ulama* had occupied the position of the Four Agents (Four Ambassadors) of the Hidden Imam. The responsibility of the Four Agents as transmitters of the Hidden Imam orders to his Shi'is had been channeled with the death of al-Sameri, the final Ambassador to the Shi'i *'ulama*, who acquired some of their duties until the awaited return of the Hidden Imam.[143] *Marja'i* in effect has become the sole responsible on behalf of the Hidden Imam in the age of the Greater Occultation. This mandate has been based on some Shi'a traditions attributed to the Twelfth Imam. The Twelfth Imam, according to one *hadith* commanded the Shi'i faithful that 'concerning the new cases that occur refers to the transmitters of our Traditions, for they are my *hujja* (proof) onto you and I am God's

[140] See Shams al-Din, M M, *al-Ijtihad wal- Tajdeed fil Fiqh al-Islami*, Beirut-1999.pp.142-6.
[141] See for different view; see for example, al-Khoei, A, 'Al-Marja'iyya Imtidad li-Khilafat al-Rasool', pp.30-2, in *al-Noor*, No.33.1994; al-Asadi, M.H, 'Jodhooraha al-Tareekhaya wa Marahil Tatewaraha', ibid, pp.40-6.
[142] See *Sadin*.
[143] See Moussavi, Ahmad, K, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam, from the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja'*, Kuala Lumpur, 1996,pp

proof unto them'.[144]

It was in the 18th century, notably with Muhammad Baqir al-Bihbihani (d. 1205/1790), that the concept of *marja'i at-taqlid* originated for the first time.[145] The victory of the Usuli School over Akhbarism after years of retreat, paved the way for the Shi'i scholars to rise as powerful spiritual leaders. This is to say that as the Usuli School necessitates a strong relationship between *marja'i al-taqlid* (or *mujtihid* in general) and Shi'a laymen, the strength of *marja'iyya* had increased significantly. It is through the principle of imitation that the Usuli School accomplished this development. Since the Usuli School divides Shi'a faithful into formally trained jurisprudents (*mujtahids*) and nonprofessionals, it commands the ordinary believers to emulate their *mujtahids* in daily life matters according to specific religious laws. As emulation has become compulsory duty for a nonprofessional, the rulings of a *mujtahid* gained religious authority. This process has developed gradually in the way that emboldened Shi'i *mujtahid* to defend his authority accordingly: 'to deny the authority of a *mujtahid* is to deny the authority of the Imam, and to deny the authority of the Imam is to make an objection to the authority of Allah, and this is tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*)'.[146] This implies, of course, that the *marja'i* is the only legal and binding authority for Shi'is.Whether concerning the daily religious imperatives or in identifying the best political direction, *marja'i's* order seems to have gained power over followers. *Marja'i*, in this sense, has filled the gap left by the Twelfth Imam and took his place peacefully. Surely, *marja'i at-taqlid* is not tantamount with imam; he is nonetheless partially empowered with some of his great prerogatives. Without doubt, this process has passed through many and different phases depending mainly on the personality of *marja'i* and the political conditions surrounding him. It is during this period that Shi'i clergymen emerged as a distinct group. Litvak

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[144]Al-Qumi, Ibn Babuya. *Ikmal al-Din wa Itmam al-Ni'ma*, in Arjomand. S. A (editor), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, p.5.

[145] Momen, M, ibid.p. 205. Halm argues that 'Allama was the first Shi'a scholar to bear the name Ayatollah, *Shiism*, p.68.

[146] Al-Mudhafar M R, *The Faith of Shi'a Islam*. p.4

argues that the ‘*ulama* of the shrine cities constituted ‘a distinct social stratum’ since the 19th century due to ‘a centuries-long process of professionalization which culminated in the reinstatement of Usulisim, and because they consisted primarily of immigrants, most of them from ethnic groups foreign to the local Arab population’.[147]

One farreaching outcome resulted from diverting the routes of trades from the Arabian Peninsula to Iran particularly affecting Arab traders as it paved the way for the Persian merchants to emerge as the most powerful class not only in Najaf but also in other parts of Iraq. The importance of this shift is that it had profoundly affected the Arab *mujtahids* who were entirely dependent on the wealth of merchants. Replacing the Arab merchants with their Persian counterparts helped to consolidate the Persian *marja'iyya* and ‘*ulama* with financial support at the expense of the Arab ones. With the rising of both Persian *mujtahids* and merchants in the 20th century, the Arab ‘*ulama* became increasingly more inclined to accept money from the new Iraqi state or even to accept the Iranian conditions. A good example in this regard is the Kashif al-Ghita family. It is related that Shaikh Mahdi Kashif al-Ghita was assigned to distribute the money of Iranian merchants among the Najafi students. As he had favored the Iranians over the Arab students, the Arab students complained against him to *mujtahids* in Najaf and Arab merchants in Baghdad. Arab students, therefore, turned their direction to another *mujtahid* and started to receive their stipends from Muhammad Salih Kubba, the Baghdadi wealthy merchant. It seems that Kashif al-Ghita himself was under the pressure of the Iranian merchants to steer their money according to their wish and Kashif al-Ghita, in turn, accepted this condition as he had a lot less money than the Persian *‘ulama*.[148]

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[147] For further details about declining Akhbarism, see Gleave, R, *Scripturalist Islam*, *the History and Doctrines of the Akhbari Shi'i School,* Brill, Leiden, 2007, pp.300-305; Litvak, M, *The ‘ulama*, ibid.p.21; Moussavi, A, K, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam*, ibid, pp.101-3.
[148] See Hirz-ul Din, M, *Marif*, ibid, vol, 1.p.311. About the transformation of the merchant class in Iraqi society, see Batatu, H, *Old Social Classes*, ibid, pp.233-6.

Marja'i at- taqlid, according to Moussavi, seems to have been institutionalized as an office in 1262/1846 when Shaikh Muhammad Hassan Najafi (d.1266/1850) was singled out by the death of all his competitors as the sole source for emulation in the Shi'ite community'.[149] This position became more centralized at the hands of Shaikh Murtada al-Ansari, who transferred this position into an institution recognized by all Shi'a people from Iraq to India.[150] In his book *Sirat an-Najat* (The Path of Salvation), al-Ansari defines emulation, its conditions and other relative issues. Emulation of a *mujtahid*, al-Ansari contends, is a requirement: only when a layperson performs some ritual act (for instance, prayer) with the proper intention and in accordance with the view of a living *mujtahid* is the ritual act valid. Otherwise, it is void.[151]

There has been no set and official procedures and criteria to identify a *mujtahid* as a sole *marja'i* for Shi'a Muslims. Until recent times, *'ilim* (knowledge) and *'Adalah* (piety) were defined as principal requirements which lead to recognize a *marja' at-taqlid*.[152] Other unwritten and unstated characters, however, may give upper hand for one *mujtahid* over others. This is to say that while all *mujtahids* are on the same footing equal scholar of *fiqh*, other personal, social, political and obviously financial aspects may contribute in determining who is *marja' at- taqlid*.

A good example in this regard is Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, who considered as one of the few active *mujtahids* for his intellectual contribution, social reformation and political engagment. However, Kashif al-Ghita's *marja'iyya* confined probably only to the Arab tribes in the Middle Euphrates region due to his limited financial resources compared with his counterpart Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani who rested on efficient

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[149] Moussavi, A, the Institution of Marja'-i Taqlid in the Nineteenth Century Shi'ite Community, *MW*, vol, LXXXIII, No 3-4- p.280; idem, *Religious Authority*, ibid,pp.187-8.
[150] Amanat, A, ibid, pp.112-113; Moussavi, A, the Institution, ibid, pp.290-1.
[151] Cole, J, Imami Jurisprudence and the Role of the Umma: Mortaza Ansari on Emulating the Supreme Exemplar, in Keddie. N(ed.) *Religion and Politics in Iran, Shi'ism from Quietism to* Revolution.p.40
[152] Anon, *al-Imam al-Sayyed Abu al-Hassan*, Najaf, al-Matba'at al-Haydarayyat, 1366 AH, pp.14-6.

financial base. During 1930s and onwards, *mujtahids* from Kashif al-Ghita family and other influential families were in need of cash and thus inclined to accept any donation made by the Iraqi government. In fact, lack of money was the main reason behind the failed *marja'ayya* of *Shaikh* Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita in 1930s and Sayyed Hussain al-Hamami in 1950s as we shall later see. Moreover, Kashif al-Ghita's political activism, it is argued, caused damages for his religious position as a *mujtahid*.[153]

As *hawza* became more and more conservative over reformative ideas, new rules have been set up determining the characters of the candidate for *marja'iyya*. Both Shaikh Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini and Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar are worth mentioning as examples. To be considered in the same line with other *mujtahids*, al-Na'ini had to give up his reformative ideas which were disseminated in his famous book *Tanbih al-Umah wa Tanzih al-Milah* for more conservative and traditional ideals within the *hawza*. For this reason, he ordered his supporters to withdraw the mentioned book from bookshops in order to keep his name in the candidates' list.

The same is true with regard to Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar who had achieved great knowledge whether through his books or his reformative project in *Kuliat al-Fiqh* (College of Law). This reformative project, his critics argued, had been a set back for him to ascend to *marja'iyya*.[154] Al-Mudhafar nonetheless has left his clear mark on the whole *hawza* system for generations to come.

Ironically, composing poetry has also been criticized for its claimed harmful effect upon the seeker of *marja'iyya*. Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi, the Arab *mujtahid* who led the Jihad Campaign, was aggressively attacked by *mujtahids* for writing lyrical poets.[155] This underlines some issues concerning *hawza* learning system, where Persian

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[153] Abbas, H, A, *Imam Kashif Al-Ghita, the Reformist Marji' in the Shi'ah School of Najaf*, pp.137-142; Anon, *al-Imam al-Sayyed Abu al-Hassan*, ibid, pp.106-7; al-Khalili, J, *Hakatha 'Araftaham*, ibid, vol,1, pp.227-250. See above about the Persian merchants and their role in supporting the Iranian *'ulama*.

[154] Al-Khalili, J, *Hakatha 'Araftaham*, ibid, vol.2, pp.22-3.

[155] Al-Khaqani, 'A, *Shua'rae al-Gharai*, vol, 9, pp.152-5; Al-Khalili, J, ibid.vol.2, p.54.

mujtahids have showed little interest in Arabic literature in contrast to their Arab counterparts who deemed poetry as an essential component of Arabic proficiency. Al-Khalili has stated that Shaikh Abd-ul Hussain al-Hilli was an obvious example for the *mujtahid* who abstained from *marja'iyya*. Al-Hilli, according to al-Khalili, showed no interest in *marja'iyya*, instead occuping himself with the 'ordinary' life of business affairs and also composing poetry.[156]

'Ulama and politics: from the Tobacco Revolution to the 1920 Iraqi Revolution

The strength of *marja'iyya* as a religious and political authority is linked mainly with the increasing of its financial sources. According to the Shi'i doctrine, the Shi'i faithful is obliged to give their *khums* (fifth of their revenue), Zakat and other religious tithes to the *mujtahid*. This provided *marja'iyya* with vast amounts of financial resources. The *Marja'i*, in his turn, is expected to use this money in building religious schools, charity to needy people and allocating stipends to his students. Other annual or external payments have also maintained *marja'iyya*.

The *Usuliyya* School and its prime symbol; the *marja'i* also benefited from the establishment of the Shi'a Oudha State in North India between 1722 and 1856. There seems to have been a reciprocal interest between the '*ulama* of *Usuliyya* School and the rulers of the Oudha State. As 'the Nishapuri nawabs, involved in a process of state formation'[157] they sought their legitimacy for establishing the state. Because of the negative attitude of the *Akhbariyya* School, which was then the mainstream, the Nishapuri nawabs directed their financial support to the '*ulama* of *Usuli* School in Najaf. In return, they received indisputable endorsement from the '*ulama* of Najaf

[156] Al-Khalili, J, ibid.vol.1, p.261.
[157] Cole, J, *Sacred Spaces and Holy War, the politics, culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*. London, 2002, p.59.

whether in the form of sending imams for the Friday prayer or responsive letters.[158]

Enhanced financial resources have given *'ulama* a sense of independency and often boldness in the face of temporal authorities. Indeed, Shi'a *'ulama* established a good position and seem to have been independent in comparison with their Sunni counterpart who depends completely upon state for their payments and salaries. The defiant stance showed by Shi'a '*ulama* against the Qajar rulers perfectly reflected this sense of confidence and independency.

Like their predecessors in the 16th and 17th centuries, Shi'a *'ulama* in Iraq during the 18th and 19th centuries maintained their contacts, mutual influence and even political concerns with their counterparts in Iran. However, unlike their predecessors who weaved good links with Safavi rulers or at most showed no interest in their affairs, Shi'a *'ulama* formed in the 19th century a formidable power capable of defying the Qajar dynasty. The Shi'i *'ulama* demonstrated their new found muscle at least in two critical events; namely the tobacco monopoly conceded to a British company in 1891 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911.

In March 1890 and as a consequence of the successive economic crises, Naser al-Din Shah granted a British compony a monopoly of Iranian tobacco. Persian merchants, who felt acutely threatened by this act, were the first to initiate their agitation in Iran. Merchants then urged their devoted ally, the *'ulama* and intellectuals to exhert pressure upon the Qajar ruler to renege on his decision. The crisis displayed, on the one hand, the deep tension between the Qajars and the '*ulama* and highlighted the political and, on the other, the economic weakness of the Qajars.[159] Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the famous reformist thinker, played a remarkable role in this agitation. Al-Afghani, who was previously expelled from Iran to Basrah for his activities against the Qajar Shah,

[158] Cole, ibid, p.79; Litvak, M, ibid, 170. See also, al-Mudhafar, M H, ibid, 242-6.

[159] Ibrahim, F, ibid, pp.221-2.

dispatched a letter to Mirza Hasan al-Shirazi urging him to act against the shah.[160] Persian clergymen and particularly merchants appealled to al-Shirazi to defend their side.[161] However, it is uncertain whether al-Shirazi issued the *fatwa* himself or if it was merely attributed to him.[162] Al-Shirazi's *fatwa*, nonetheless, ended the question in the interest of the opposition group. The clergy of *Atabat* had undoubtedly emerged as triumphant in a way that enhanced their reputation as an independent and powerful player in the political arena. With this *fatwa*, it is possible to speak of a new development in religio-political activities within the community of clergy in Iraq, the development that would be articulated again during the next decade in the Constitutional Revolution. The significance of the tobacco crises, as Algar put it, was the prelude to the Constitutional Revolution.[163]

In fact, the Constitutional Crisis was one of the most pivotal issues that divided the '*ulama* of Najaf in particular, and its people in general. It is probably true to distinguish three episodes within the Constitutional Revolution. The first one began in April 1905 with the protest movement that was organized and led mainly by Persian merchants and bazaaries.[164] Again the bazaar seemed to have been the driving force behind the mass protest aginst the custom administration. The movement gained root and became more popular in November 1905 when both Sayyed 'Abdullah Bihbihani and Sayyed Muhammad Tabataba'i sided with the protest and were later joined by *Shaikh*

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[160] See the letter in Brown, Edward G, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*, Cambridge, the University Press, 1910, pp.15-22; Ibrahim, F, ibid, p.61. Hairi purports that al-Afghani played a great role during the latter Constitutional Revolution. However, considering the fact that al-Afghani died several years before the Constitutional Revolution, thus it is only possible to speak of some limited impact especially through Sayyed Muhammad al-Tabatabai, as we shall see. See Hairi, A H, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, a Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics*, Leiden-E.J. Brill, 1977, p.2, pp.52-4.

[161] Al-Wardi, 'Ali, *Lamahat*, vol, 3, p.94.

[162] Algar, H, ibid.p.215

[163] Algar, H, ibid, 205.

[164] Martin, V, *Islam and Modernism, the Iranian Revolution of 1906*, Syracuse University Press-New York-1989, pp.40-1, 52-6, 99-103; Farsani, Soheila,T, Merchants, their Class Identification Process, and Constitutionalism, pp.117-30, in (edits) Chhabi, H.C & Martin, V, *Iran's Constitutional Revolution, Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connecting*, I.B.Tauris, London-2010.

Fadhlallah Nuri.[165] Thus, the protest gradually developed into a wide national movement espicially after the *bast* in July-August 1906, near the British legation.[166] From a limited complaint put forward by disgruntled merchants, the protest turned now into a populist movement demanding political reform, social justice and democratic participation.

Eventually, this episode realized its goal when the orchestrated protest backed by the *'ulama* foreced the Qajar authority to concede to the people's demands. Henceforth, it brought into being a constitution and the formation of a consultative assembly (*majlis*). The second episode started with the death of Mudhaffar ud-Din Shah, and the pressures exerted by Russian upon his successor and son Muhammad 'Ali Shah (1907-09) to crush the constitutional group in 1908.[167] From this moment on, the Persian *'ulama* and especially the merchants moved their political and religious campaign to Najaf which was accordingly affected by the debate on the legitimacy of a constitution. However, the *Question of Mashroota and Mostebeda*, as it called in Najaf, not only provoked intellectual debate among the '*ulama* but most importantly divided the people of Najaf into two parties, the party of *Mashroota* (conditional) and the party of *Mostebeda* (despot). Whereas Shaikh Muhammad Kadhim al-Khurasani was the leader of the *Mashroota* party, (thus named *Abu al-Ihrar* Father of Freemen), which contained mostly educated people, the party of *Mostebeda*, consisted almost of the illiterate majority in Najaf, was headed by Sayyed Kadhim al-Yezdi.[168]

Obviously, the two great powers Russia and Britain were in fierce competition over influence in Iran. In addition to their established good contacts in Iran, they founded,

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[165] Bayat, M, *Iran's First Revolution, Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905- 1909*, New York-Oxford University Press-1991, p.124; Martin, V, ibid, p.61.
[166] Martin, V, *Islam and Modernism, the Iranian Revolution of 1906*, Syracuse University Press-New York-1989, p.52, p.87.
[167] Ibrahim, F, ibid, pp. 226-259
[168] Al-Kadhimi, M M, *Ahsan Al-Wadheea'a fi Tarajum Ashhar Mashaheer Mujtahdi al-Shi'a*. Baghdad-Matbat al-Najah.1348 H, pp.180-90; al-Qazwini, J, *al-Marja'iyya al-Deenayya al-'Alya Inda al-Shi'a al-Imamayya*, pp, 232-5.

especially after realizing the consequences of the tobacco crises, bases in Najaf and Karbal to follow, and to influence if possible, the *'ulama's* positions.[169] Considering the role played by Najafi *'ulama* during the Tobacco Concession in 1891, Russia established consulates in Najaf in 1908 proceeded by the British in Karbala. The Russian consulate was headed by Abu al-Qasim al-Shirwani, who skillfully played a great part in persuading al-Yazdi to take a stand against al-Khurasani during the crisis.[170] Britain nominated Muhsin Hassan al-Kabili al-Qandahari in charge of its consulate in Karbala, taking the side of the Constitutionalists in both Iraq and Iran.[171] Contact was established between al-Khurasani and the British Consul-General through Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini who met, along with some other *'ulama*, British officials at Baghdad.[172] The two consulates apparently took part in the crisis through establishing networks of supporters, which included *'ulama*, dignitaries and even gangs. Money and bribes were distributed to Najafi gangs to stand behind al-Yazdi.[173]

During this episode, Mirza Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini composed his book *Tanbih al-Umma wa Tanzih al-Mille* (The Admonition and Refinement of the People). In his book, al-Na'ini incorporated new Western conceptions, such as democracy, constitution, parliament and so forth within the framework of Islamic ideas. In response to the anticonstitutionalist argument that put forward by Shaikh Fadhlollah Nuri, al-Na'ini put forward that there is 'no room to doubt the necessity of changing a despotic regime into a constitutional one'. For al-Na'ini, both the Sunni doctrine 'concerning the authority of the 'people of loosening and binding' [*ahl-e hall wa 'aqd*] and the Shia tradition, 'during the Greater Occultation, the *mujtahids* are responsible for the

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[169] Bayat, M, *Iran's First Revolution,* ibid, pp.18-30.
[170] Al-Khaqani, 'Ali, ibid, vol, 10, p. 86; Al-Asadi, H, ibid, p.61; al-Khayoun, R, *al-Mashroota wal Mostebeda*, Baghdad-Beirut, 2006, 1st published, p153.
[171] Al-Khayoun, R, *al-Mashroota wal Mostebeda*, ibid, p.154.
[172] Hairi, A H, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran,* ibid, p.112
[173] Al-Khaqani, 'Ali, ibid, vol, 10, p. 87; al-Asadi, H, ibid, pp.59-61; al-Khayoun, R, *al-Mashroota wal Mostebeda*, ibid, p.152.

Muslim's affairs' would lead to make the parliamentary, hence the constitutional system lawful.[174]

Surely, the Constitutional crisis was not the first clash between Shi'i *'ulama*. As we noticed, *'ulama* often took different standpoints concerning political authority, the question that divided them into pro and anti camps. Usuli-Akhbari conflict also brought Shi'i *'ulama* into the point of split. Usuli *'ulama* even came to regard some Akhbari *'ulama* as heretics and infidels and even called on Shi'i faithful to put an end for their threat.[175] However, the Constitutional Revolution was the first confrontation erupted among the Shi'i *'ulama* of the same school (Usulism) for sheer political opinions. This is not to deny, however, other relevant external and internal implications. For example, al-Khurasani was a student of Mirza al-Shirazi and was therefore probably influenced by his master's personal and views.[176]

The third episode in the Constitutional Revolution dates with the victory of the Constitutionalists and the restoration of the Majlis in 1909. However, the victory of the Constitutionalist in Iran accompanied by disorders and atrocities as both Nuri and Bihbihani were murdered; this served al-Yazdi's position, who soon established himself in Najaf as the sole *marja'i taqleed* particularly after the sudden death of al-Khurasani in 1911. This also became possible thanks to the support al-Yazdi received from Arab *'ulama* like Kashif al-Ghita's family, other Najafi dignitaries and certainly the local militiamen. Clearly, al-Yazdi constructed a reliable network among Arab families and Persian alike owing to his financial resources.

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[174] Azar, T, Shi'i clergy in Iranian politics, in (pp.47-72) Keddie, N (ed.) *Religion and Politics in Iran. Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven, see pp.58-9. See also, Martin, V, *Islam and Modernism, the Iranian Revolution of 1906*, Syracuse University Press-New York-1989, pp.180-6; Bayat, M, *Iran's First Revolution*, ibid, pp.172-82; Lahidji, Abdol Karim, 'Constitutionalism and Clerical Authority' in Arjomand, S A (ed.), ibid.pp.133-158.

[175] See for example, Kashif al-Ghita , M H, *al-'Abaqat al-'Anbarayya fil al-Tabaqat al-Ja'farayya, Tareekh al-Marji'ayya al-Dinayya fil Qarnain al-Thamin 'Ashar wal Tasi'a 'Ashar al-Miladaian*, (edit) Dr. Jawdat Al-Qazwini, 1998, Beirut,p.86 onwards.

[176] Ibrahim, F, ibid, p.214.

The tobacco crisis and the Constitutional Revolution showed:

1. The weight of the political role played by Shi'i *'ulama* in confronting the ruling government, their powerful religious and social influence among imitators. They also revealed the extent of interdependence between political and religious developments in Iran and the Shi'a *marja'iyya* in Iraq, and the latter's explicit role within Iranian affairs in the late 19th century and beyond. Although the centre of events was in Iran, the two crises demonstrated the central role of the Shi'i *'ulama* in the Iraqi holy cities particularly in Najaf and their impact on the political happenings in Iran. This role, however, would be severely checked and brought to a minimum with the establishment of the nation state in Iraq as we shall later see.[177]

2. The prime role of the bazaar in Iranian political life and its impact upon *'ulama*. As a matter of fact, merchants and Iranian bazaar remained extremely important in creating political developments in Iran. They are certainly considered among the driving forces that stood behind the success of the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79.

3. As a response to the Constitutional Revolution, and under the impact of Western thoughts and ideas, a new form of intellectual and theological debate emerged. Political in its thrust, this theological response was carried out mainly by the *Usuli* School in Iraq and Iran. It should be emphasized here, however, that the Constitutional dilemma was an internal dispute fought by the advocators of the *Usuli* School among themselves rather than between the *Usuli* and *Ikhbari* scholars.[178]

The Constitutional Revolutions of Iran (1905-1911) and Turkey (1908-18) were of the most important motivation that resulted in lively religio-political debates and discussions within the Shi'a milieu in particular. Through circulation of new

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[177] Amanat, A, 'In Between the Madrasa and the Marketplace: The Designation of Clerical Leadership in Modern Shi'ism', p.118, in Arjomand, S A, (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, State University of New York Press, 1988, pp.98-131; Algar, H, ibid, p.26.

[178] See about this point, Anayat, Hamid, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2009, p161.

newspapers, magazines and books, these crises contributed to introducing new concepts and thoughts in both Iraq and Iran. Subsequently, intellectual dispute was openly undertaken between two trends; the so-called conservative trend and the new modern one. In Najaf in particular, the Constitutional Revolution, gave rise to a group of very influential *'ulama* who later would participate in future political upheavals. This group included, among others, Abdul Karim al-Jaza'eri, Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi, Hibat al-Din al-Shihristani, and Mirza Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini and many more.[179] These men were to lead political events in the Shi'a community during the next four decades.

The significance of the constitutional crisis in Turkey in particular that it guaranteed new liberties to marginalized communities through freedom of press, publishing books and so on.[180] Before 1908, for instance, Najaf was receiving few Persian and Indian newspapers and magazines. *Habil al-Matin* Newspaper from India, *Karmanshah* and *Jamalia* Newspapers and *Bahar* magazine from Iran, all of these had expressed clear support for the constitutional liberals in Iran, Turkey and Iraq. It was only after the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908-1909 that a new wave of Arabic newspapers and magazines found their way to Najaf primarily from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. Al-Asadi and al-Turihi state that between 1904 and 1914, about 50 to 100 Arabic newspapers and magazines were widely circulated to Najafis every week. The list of magazines included al-*Manar* of Rashid Rida, *al-Mukatam*, *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Hilal*, *al-Shams*, *al-'Asoor* and *al-Muqtabas* and many more.[181]

No less important, this wave of new ideas has shifted the focus of attention from the east (Iran, Turkey and India) to the west. In other words, the new revival of Arabic culture and spreading of new political concepts and ideas in Najaf owes a lot to the Fertile Crescent countries. Thanks to this new intellectual and cultural shift, new

[179] See a full list of names in al-Asadi, H, ibid, p.62.
[180] Mahbuba, B, ibid.vol.1.pp.28-9.
[181] Al-Turihi, M K, ibid, pp,333-335; al-Asadi, ibid.p.181; al-Rahaimi, ibid. pp.157-159.

political ideologies made their way to wider audience.[182]

'Ulama and militia-bandits: precarious relationship

As we stated briefly, Sayyed Kadhim al-Yezdi had relied heavily during the Constitutional crisis on Najafi gangs who provided him with guardianship and protection. Without this support, al-Yazdi certainly would have met troubles as he was in shaky position in front of Shaikh al-Khurasani, the head of *Mashroota* party.[183] Although it is 'difficult to assess'[184] the nature of relationship between the Shi'i '*ulama* and groups of gangs, it is possible to speak of some pragmatic ties between them. Whereas some *'ulama*, such as Shaikh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita and Sayyed Kadhim al-Yazdi, either sponsored or relied on these groups to implement order and defending themselves, some other '*ulama* frequently came at loggerheads with them, calling for the Ottomans to end the chaos resulting from their conflicts. One can speak, therefore, of fluctuating courses of collaboration and tension that marked the relationship between *'ulama* and gangs.

As mentioned earlier (chapter one), Najafi leading families had gained the virtual control over the four quarters since 1850. Najaf was divided into four quarters: al-Mishraq, al-Buraq, al-'Amarah and al-Huwaish. Each of the four quarters was governed by one of the notable Arab families and has had its own armed group, which consisted of tens of young people whose main responsibility was to defend their quarter against any raids. Gangs had their distinct traditions and customs as well as their own characters and qualities. They were almost always young bachelor men dressed in quite a distinctive way. In comparison to the previous groups, which established their status on the possession of wealth, knowledge or lineage, gangs had been chiefly distinguished by its possession of weapons and courage. As opposed to religious students, '*ulama*,

[182] Al-Asadi, H, ibid. 50-54; Mahbuba, ibid, vol, 1, p, 340, 375.
[183] Al-Kadhimi, M M, *Ahsan al-Wadhaa',* ibid, p.190; Al-Mousawi, M, *al-Haj 'Atiyya Abu Gillal al-Taei*, ibid.pp.26-7; Hirz-ul al-Din, *Marif al-Rijal* ibid, vol, 2, pp.326-9.
[184] Heine, Peter, ibid. p. 43.

merchants and *Sadah* who tend to carry out a pious or normal life; gangs have showed great enthusiasm for harsh life, fighting and other Bedouin values such as generosity and so on.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the picture in Najaf was as follows: al-‘Amarah was headed by ‘Atiyya Abu Gillal backed by several families such as Albu Bilal, Albu ‘Amir and Albu Kermashah. Sa’ad al-Haj Radi was the chief of al-Mishraq and secured the support of Albu Shigagi, al-Gewam, al-Darawish and many others. Al-Buraq was controlled by Kadhim Subi who was aided by Albu Jraiw, Albu Alshimirti, Albu Alma’mar, Albu Doush and many other families. The leader of al-Huwaish was Sayyed Mahdi Sayyed Salman who was in charge of Albu Alhar, Albu ‘Adhwa, Albu Sharba and Albu Shaba’.[185]

Evidently, quarter leadership has not always been recognized by wealth. Courage, generosity, judiciousness and to a lesser extent some efficient money, all these elements have contributed in identifying the leadership issue. Kadhim Subi, chief of al-Buraq, for instance, belongs originally to a humble family though he was recognized as fearless and brave man. ‘Atiyya Abu Gillal, the Robin Hood of Najaf and the leader of al-‘Amarah quarter, was considered as the most respected man in Najaf as he was brave, generous and crafty. Both the head of al-Mishraq, Sa’ad al-Haj Radi and head of al-Huwaish Sayyed Mahdi Sayyed Salman were recognized for their sound judgments and belonging to notable families.[186]

Islamic history witnessed the phenomenon of gangs and bandits since the late of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate. This phenomenon has always correlated with the weakness of government control over some parts of its territory. Such circumstances offer some local

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[185] India Office, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, ibid.p.29; al-Wardi, *Dirasa fi Tabeeaat al-Mujtama’ al-Iraqi*, ibid, pp.179-81, 188-9.

[186] Al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid, vol, 4, pp.407-10 & vol, 5, pp.206-13 & pp 268-69; al-Asadi: ibid. pp.93-94; Al-Hasani, A A, *Thawrat al-Najaf*, Beirut, pp.59-66.

groups with the good opportunity to claim the responsibility of protecting their people. These groups have come to be known as *Shutar* and *Ayyarin* in the Islamic writings and literature.[187] Damascus, Aleppo and Cairo experienced this phenomenon during the Mamluk rule. In Syria, whereas such militia groups were called *Ahdath* in the pre-Mamluk period, they came to be labeled as *Zu'ar* in the Mamluk period.[188] In Iran, too, during the Qajar era, Shi'i '*ulama* surrounded themselves with a group of men called *Lutes*.[189]

It is no certain when these armed groups formed in Najaf for the first time. It is believed, however, that it was founded initially in response to the Wahabi attacks on the Holy Cities of Najaf and Karbala that took place in the early of 1800s. In 1801, the first Wahabi raid stormed Karbala. Once they accomplished their attack, Wahabi raiders headed to Najaf. From this moment on, Najafis had to confront the new enemy almost once a year.[190] Realizing the scale of this unpredictable threat, Shaikh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita, the grand *Mujtahid* of his time, prescribed Najafis to form an armed group in order to protect their city. Kashif al-Ghita himself chose young, bachelor and brave persons, allocated them with regular monthly payment to carry out this task. Furthermore, Kashif al-Ghita ordered religious students and even '*ulama* to participate in this defensive campaign. As the men chosen for fighting were bachelors free of any other responsibilities, thus they were called *Zghurit*, which means literally a person who has no heavy burden. Najaf, thus, stemmed Wahabi raids in spite of the fact that attacks continued even after the founding of the Iraqi state in 1921.[191]

In 1814, unexpected event occurred, leading Najaf to a new course of events. Shaikh

[187] Hourani, Albert, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London, 2002.p.123.
[188] Lapidus, I, *Muslim Cities*, ibid, p.154.
[189] Mottahedeh, Roy, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, Princeton University Press-1980.pp.157-67; Momen, M, ibid, p.199.
[190] Al-'Azawi, A, *Tarikh al-Iraq bain Ihtelalain*, vol.6, Baghdad, 1954, p. 169.
[191] H.E. Sir Henry Dobbs, K.C.S.I, High Commissioner for the Iraq, p. 272 in *Selected Letters of Gertrud Bell*, Penguin Books, London, 1953; Mahbuba, J, *Madhi al-Najaf wa Hadheraha*, ibid, vol, 1, pp.238-43; Nakash, Y, ibid, p.155.

Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita sent a group of *Zghurit* men to negotiate with Sayyed Mahmood al-Rahbawi, an eminent Najafi man who was living in al-Ruhba in the marginal desert of Najaf. Al-Rahbawi was accused of collaboration with Wahabis (due to his refusal to give an advance warning against them), but rejected any negotiations with Kashif al-Ghita's delegates. In the following day, al-Rahbawi was found murdered. A relative of al-Rahbawi in Najaf held Shaikh Ja'far's men responsible for killing Sayyed Mahmood al-Rahbawi, gathering around him supporters who called later *Shmurit*. From this moment on, Najaf entered into what may be described as a long civil war between the two factional groups; *Zghurit* and *Shmurit*.[192]

Whereas the majority of Najafis were *Zughrit*, *Shmurit* constituted a small minority. As a matter of fact, the inhabitants of al-Huwaish, al-'Amarah and al-Buraq were *Zughrit*. Al-Mishraq was the only quarter that governed by *Shmurit*. Subsequently, competition and vying for leadership in Najaf had characterized the relationship between *Zughrit* and *Shmurit*. This internal tension and enmity between these two groups provided the central authority in Baghdad (the Ottomans and afterward the British) a good opportunity to impose its word and designate their favorite man. The Ottomans, for example, took the advantage of the clashes between *Zughrit* and *Shmurit* that broke out in 1812 to appoint 'Abbas al-Hadad, the leader of *Zughrit*, as a governor for the city. Having controlled Najaf, al-Hadad not only crushed *Shmurit* but also went further to reject the orders of Baghdad's governor, Daood Pasha, who appointed him. Occasionally, the course of rivalry and conflict was in motion even among the chiefs of the same group over the issue of leadership. Contest between the two leaders of *Zughrit*, 'Atiyya Abu Gillal, chief of al-'Amarah quarter and Sayyed Mahdi Sayyed Salman, chief of al-Huwaish, is a good example in hand.[193]

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[192] Mahbuba, J, ibid, pp.238-43; Hirz-ul al-Din, *Ma'rif al-Rijal,* vol.3.pp.299-303. See the footnote in pp.299-300; Kashif al-Ghita, M H, *al-'Abaqat al-'Anbarayya fil al-Tabaqat al-Ja'farayya*, ibid, pp.128-34.

[193] Mahbuba, B, ibid, pp.241-2 ; Litvak, M, ibid. p.124; al-Asadi, H, ibid.p.84

To better understand the role played by this group, one example might be intriguing. Like his predecessor ‘Abbas al-Hadad, ‘Atiyya Abu Gillal, Shaikh of al-‘Amarah was revered as the most powerful man in the city. His words were more decisive and sharper than the *fatwas* of the leading ‘*ulama* among Najafis. Non-Arab students and ‘*ulama* often sought Abu Gillal’s refuge and protection in al-‘Amarah quarter.[194] Owing to his reputation as a fighter, he took the charge of mediation and negotiations with both the Ottomans and the British. Prior to the World War I, he monopolized the trafficking weapons trade and some other business, making good profits. This entitled him not only a wide reputation of being noble and generous man among Iraqis, but also an immense influence upon *mujtahids* and *mumins* to the extent that he was a mediator among the ‘*ulama* themselves.[195]

It is intriguing here stressing the fact that almost all Najafi gangs and their leaders originated from Arab families. With contrast to Karbala where ‘the city’s gangs split into a minority Iranian faction and a majority Arab grouping’, [196] membership of the Najafi gangs was almost confined to the Arab families. This is due mainly to the predominance of the Arab Bedouin characters of Najaf’s inhabitants as well as the limited role of the Persian minority in Najaf in comparison with that of Karbala.

On the other hand, some ‘*ulama* in Najaf had sought on occasions the Ottoman support in order to put pressure on these groups. For example, a few Najafi ‘*ulama* signed in 1878 a letter addressed to the Ottoman governor and asked for bringing order to their city. In his letter to the Wali of Baghdad, Sayyed Ja’far al-Khirsan appealed for the Ottoman governor to send his ‘victorious troops’ to Najaf to extinguish the fire of the

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[194] Al-Mousawi, M, *al-Haj ‘Atiyyah Abu Gillal al-Taei*, Baghdad-1957, pp.26-7.

[195] Peter Heine, *Zghurt and Shmurt: Aspects of the Traditional Shi’i Society*, p.40, (36-44) in Jabar, F, *Ayatollahs, Sufis and ideologies, State, religion and social Movements in Iraq.* London, Saqi Books, 2002; Al-Hassani, A A, ibid, footnote in pp.10-11.

[196] Cole and Momen, Mafia, Mob and Shiism in Iraq: the Rebellion of Ottoman Karbala 1824-1843, *PP*.No.112, 1986, p.119; Al-Ameen, M, *Ma’din al-Jawahir wa Nuzhat al-Khawatir*, vol, 4, Beirut, Lebanon, 1983, pp 91-92.

fitna (sedition).[197] Military action brought some relief for the city for some time but did not eliminate the gang danger.

At another level, it is possible to talk of two different approaches observed among Najafi '*ulama* concerning the gangs. On one side, it appears that Persian *'ulama* attempted to appease these gangs especially by paying them bribes to escape any trouble (al-Yazdi and Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani, al-Shirazi for example). It is said that the real reason that pushed Mirza Muhammad Hassan al-Shirazi to leave Najaf to Samara was the *Zughrit's* gangs, who demanded their share of the 'Indian money'.[198] It seems al-Shirazi lack of power or influence among these gangs may have led him to move to Samara rather than fighting in Najaf.

On the other side, Arab '*ulama* starting from Shaikh Ja'far who had massive power over these gangs up to the leading '*ulama* in the mid of the 20th century seems to have been more willing to use even force against these gangs. Supported by his own tribe and other strong tribes of the Middle Euphrates, Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, for instance, did not hesitate in using sheer force against these gangs whether through their tribes or by his own armed men during 1930s and after.[199]

Likewise, rival political parties in the city considered hiring gangs to protect their compatriots from any attacks. Both the Communists and Arab nationalists in the city had their own gangs whose main duty was to protect their members during the height of political fighting during 1950s and 1960s. Gangs, in turn, were perhaps affiliated with parties because of their personal beliefs or motivated by financial impetus. It is reported

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[197] BOA, Ird.Dah, 19157, 4Receb 1270 (1853) in 'Ma'rouf, S, *Wathaeq Arabaya min al-Arsheef al-Othmani an Ahwal al-Iraq*, London, 1997, pp.27-29. In this letter, the name of sayyed Ja'far cited as Al-Khourasani. The correct is al-Kharsan. See also Litvak, M, ibid. p.163; Nawar, A, ibid. p.96.

[198] Al-Homani, M 'A, *al-'Arouba'at, Man Yasma'a*? Baghdad-1952, p.25.

[199] Personal interview with Sayyed Hamid Al-Momin (22/12/2005, Najaf).

that until the end of 1970s gangs and bandits manifested their presence and tried to play some role in Najaf, albeit in a personal and non-partisan fashion.[200]

Shi'a *'ulama* and British: confrontation, compromise and final combat

Between 1914 and 1920, violence broke out three times between the British and Shi'is. The British troops that landed in the last weeks of 1914 at Fao (south of Iraq), were confronted by a joint force of Ottoman and Shi'a fighters. The Shi'i '*ulama* of the holy cities put aside their enmity towards the Turks, turning their attention to the urgent holy task. Najaf became the main base for *Mujahidin* and the driving force for the Jihad Campaign under the leadership of Sayyed Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi. With the support of other *Mujtahids* such as Mahdi al-Haydari and Mahdi al-Khalisi, al-Haboobi mobilized his fighters to the south to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Ottomans against the British. After fierce fighting, the British forces managed to defeat the Turks and *Mujahidin*, compelling them to retreat.[201]

Once they completed their conquest of Iraq, the British sought hard to construct normal relationships with both Sunni and Shi'a *'ulama* and tribal Shaikhs. In general, the British maintained cordial relations with tribal Shaikhs both Shi'a and Sunni. No less important, was the success that British officials seem to have gained among Shi'i *'ulama*, most importantly with Sayyed Kadhim al-Yazdi. This explains the lukewarm position of both Shi'a *'ulama* and tribal chiefs in the support of the Najaf uprising of 1918.[202]

On 19 March 1918, a group of armed Najafis killed Captain Marshal, one of the British Army Political Officers stationed near Najaf. This accident was planned by a secret society founded in Najaf in 1918 called *Jama'ayat al-Nahdha al-Islamiya* (the League of the Islamic Renaissance). The society consisted of a diversity of members: junior

[200] Al-Sayegh, A A, *Shaqawat al-Najaf*, part.8.pp.1-15 & part 9.pp.1-5. www.alnoor.se/article (accessed 26/01/2009)
[201] About the Jihad Campaign, see al-Wardi, 'Ali, *Lamahat,* ibid, vol, 4, pp, 127-48.
[202] Al-Nifisi, *Dour al-Shi'a*, ibid, p.60)

'ulama, tribal chiefs, ordinary Najafis and above all was supported by good section of *Zughrit* armed members.[203] The mastermind behind this society, it was reported, was Muhammad Jawad al-Jaza'eri, a junior *Mujtahid* of a renowned Najafi family. Najafis endured the British siege for almost two months. British forces attacked Najaf with cannons, and water and food supply was cut. The city surrendered to the British, who captured rebels, executing eleven of them and exiling more than one hundred of those involved in the uprising.[204] During this uprising, al-Yazdi showed no sympathy to the pleas of the rebels. In fact, al-Yazdi:

'defended his position with the argument that he was a man of religion and had nothing to do with politics, he nonetheless repeatedly told British officials that he opposed rebellion and he showed his satisfaction at the crushing of the leaders of the quarters'.[205]

A British report stated that:

'It is difficult to overestimate the value to us of Saiyid Muhammad Kadhim's unbroken support. Provided his name is never quoted officially, we can invariably count upon him for help'.[206]

Not surprisingly, immediately after the failure of the uprising and execution of its leaders, rumors spread in Najaf depicting al-Yazdi as a covert agent working for the British.[207]

The death of al-Yazdi on 27 Rajab 1337/ 30 April 1919 opened the road not only for the ascent of Mirza Taqi al-Shirazi as the sole *marja'i*, but also for a dramatic change in

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[203] Vinogradov, Amal, The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of the Tribes in National Politics, *IJMES*, vol, 3, No, 2 (April. 1972), pp.123-39, see, p.133; Atiyyah, G, ibid, pp.229-30; al-Hasani, *al-Thoura al-Iraqia al-Koubra*, ibid, footnote, p.58; idem, *Thawrat al-Najaf*, Beirut- 1982, pp.24-30.

[204] Al-Shibibi, Muhammad Rida, Thawrat al-Najaf, *al-Thaqafat al-Jadeedah*, No. 4, 1969, pp. 281-340; Atiyyah, G, ibid, p.232; al-Hasani, A A, *Thawrat al-Najaf*, ibid, p.46; al-Nifisi, ibid, pp.61-3.

[205] Atiyyah, G, ibid, p.232. See also al-Shibibi, ibid, p.303, p.330.

[206] F.O. 371/3397/165202, Collection of Fortnightly Reports, by the Civil Commissioner. Report No. 12 April 15 to May 1, 1918, cited in Atiyyah, G, ibid, p.233.

[207] About this issue, see al-'Alawi, Hadi, *Fi al-Din wal Turath*, Dar al-Talee'a, Beirut, 1973, pp.129-33; al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid. vol.5/2, pp.266-7. See also about al-Yazdi, Atiyyah, G, ibid, p.232; al-Hasani, A A, *Thawrat al-Najaf*, Beirut- 1982, p.46, 47, 76; al-Shibibi, M R, ibid, pp. 281-340.

Iraqi history. In fact, British officials attempted to build good relationship with his successor;[208] however this attempt failed as al-Shirazi seemed under the influence of his son, Muhammad Rida and other Iraqi groups. Thus, British contacts with the Shi'a community started to deteriorate as their relation with Shi'i *'ulama* came to a breaking point. In March, 1920, just three months before the 1920 Revolution, Gertrude Bell complained that:

'It's a problem here how to get into touch with the Shiahs, not the tribal people in the country; we're on intimate terms with all of them, but the grimly devout citizens of the holy towns and more especially the leaders of religious opinion, the Mujtahids, who can loose and bind with a word… And for the most part they are very hostile to us, a feeling we can't alter because it's so difficult to get at them'.[209]

Al-Shirazi soon became the vocal about the events occurring and was approached by both Sunni and Shi'a figures. Political societies, especially *Haras al-Istiqlal* (Guardians of Independence), threw their weight behind al-Shirazi. Also tribal chiefs in the Mid-Euphrates were in regular contacts with al-Shirazi. In his reply to a question concerning the rule of Iraq, al-Shirazi clearly put it that:

'None but Muslims have any right to rule over Muslims'.[210]

This statement was a legal binding opinion often used by tribal *Shaikh* not only to justify their participation but also to persuade others to join the fighting. Probably, the harsh policies adopted by some British officers in the Middle Euphrates were the main reasons behind the revolution. British officers often insulted tribal *Shaikhs* and Sayyeds in order to keep order in the areas under their control. The result however was the opposite. Two incidents seem to have precipitated the revolution: the arrests of Muhammad Rida al-Shirazi, the *Marja'i*'s son by the British for his political activities,

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[208] Al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid. vol.5/1, pp, 62-3; al-Hasani, *al-Thoura al-Iraqia al-Koubra*, ibid, p.61.
[209] *Selected Letters of Gertrude Bell*, ibid, p.245.
[210] Vinogradov, Amal, The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered, ibid, pp.135-6.

and Sha'lan Abu al-Choon, the chief of al-Dhiwalim tribe. These two incidents convinced both Shi'i *'ulama* and tribal *Shaikhs* of the real threat posed by the British occupation.[211] Najaf and Karbala were the main scene of the revolution while Kadhamayya was the centre of coordination between Shi'is and Sunnis. Muhammad al-Sadr, who himself was a member of *Haras al-Istiqlal*, was the chief coordinator of events in Baghdad. Nationalist elements in Baghdad were pulling the strings behind the scenes, projecting the image that they controlled the whole situation.[212] In reality, Shi'a tribal *Shaikhs* and *Sadah* bore the brunt and were the real makers of the revolution in accordance with Shi'i *mujtahids*. The Revolution was the moment where *'ulama*, *Sadah*, and tribal Shaikhs came together to work in harmony. In the Mid-Euphrates in particular, the wealthy influential *Sadah* like Sayyed Noor al-Yasiri, Muhsin Abu Tibikh and Hadi Zwain and many others acted with tribal *Shaikhs* like Abdul Wahid Al Sukar, Abu al-Choon and many more as intermediaries between the *marja'iyya* and *mujtahids* on one side and their followers on the other.

Despite the fact that the Revolution did not compel the British to quit Iraq, it nonetheless changed their long-term policy. Most importantly, British officials became more disillusioned with the prospect of bringing Shi'i *'ulama* under their control and close to Sunni elites. The Revolution has been a turning point in Iraqi history as the Iraqi Shi'is in particular felt the grief of betrayal and deception considering the course of future political events as we shall see. Their basic logical conclusion was as follows: we sacrificed our lives for Iraq yet others cultivated the final result.[213]

Arab *mujtahids* and political activism

As observed earlier, *mujtahids* and junior *'ulama* played a vital role in the Najaf

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[211] For more details about the revolution, see Kadhim, A, *Reclaiming Iraq, The 1920 Revolution and the Foundation of the Modern State*, Austin, University of Texas Press, USA, 2012, chapter 2, pp, 43-68; al-Basir, M M, *Tarikh al-Qadhayya al-'Iraqayya*, London, 1990,pp.104-14; al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid, vol.5/1-2; Atiyyah,G, ibid, pp.307-28; al-Hasani, *al-Thoura al-Iraqia al-Koubra*, ibid, pp.87-8; al-Nifisi, ibid, ibid, pp. 130-57.

[212] See Bell, G, ibid, pp.248-9.

[213] See Kadhim, A, ibid, pp.151-9; al-Nifisi, ibid, pp.158-60.

uprising of 1918 against the British. This role became more obvious especially with al-Yazdi's withdrawal from political scene. Again, the *marja'iyya*'s non-political role adopted between 1924 and 1950 was in stark contrast to the apparent politicized involvement on the part of *mujtahids*.

One may safely argue that *mujtahids* filled the gap left by *marja'iyya* itself particularly during the British mandate or under subsequent Iraqi governments. Admittedly, many *mujtahids* played similar if not more significant role than the *marja'i* himself. Al-Jaza'eri two brother's Shaikh Muhammad Jawad and 'Abdul Karim, Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi and many others have exercised a very influential role in Iraqi political affairs. It is reported that any affair related to Shi'a community was first discussed in 'Abdul Karim al-Jaza'eri's house before the conclusion of a decision.[214] Adding to their traditional role as mediators with the Shi'a community, *mujtahids* formed good potential partners for Baghdad statesmen. Rival statesmen in Baghdad often solicited *mujtahids* to work together so as to form new government or to show their opposition to the current cabinet. Arab *mujtahids* in particular were the target of politicians from national capital as they formed the second line of religious men in Najaf. This group included, to name few of them, Al-Shibibi, al-Jaza'eri, Bahr-ul 'Ulum, Al Shaikh Radhi, Al Yasin, Al al-Sadr, and other prominent families. It is striking that from the beginning of the 20th century up until 1950, while the *marja'iyya* position was monopolized by the Persian *'ulama*, all other leading *mujtahids* came from Arab families. Furthermore some *mujtahids* like Sayyed Salih al-Hilli and Sayyed Hassan al-Khirsan had a limited *marja'ayya* with a small number of Arab Shi'a imitators.[215]

Although *mumins* were considered as inferior to *mujtahids*, it must be admitted that some *mumins* played great role in *hawza* in Shi'a communities in general. Propagation and dissemination of the teachings of *marja'iyya* among Shi'a people were chiefly

[214] Shukir, M A, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf, Rijal wa Afkar wa Mawaqif*. (Unpublished book), vol, 2, p.58.

[215] Al-Dujaili, J, *Mousoa'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, vol, 4, pp.331-341.

carried out by *mumins* or religious *Shaikhs*.[216] In fact, *mumins* embodied the propaganda-like machine for Shi'i '*ulama* and its institution (*marja'iyya*). It was the *mumin* who took the burden of responsibility of spreading Shi'ism during the 19th century. Furthermore, *mumins* also acted as preachers and lecturers during the 1920 Iraqi Revolution. Depending on one *marja'i* or specific *mujtahid* in his religious *fatwa* and stipends, most *mumins* tended to collect money on behalf of their masters and defended their views. His master, in turn, provides him with regular payments, religious knowledge and social patronage. When the Iraqi government arrested Shaikh Ahmad Asad Allah in 1935, the agent of the *Marja'i* Sayyed Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani in Rumitha, Shaikh Khawam 'Abdul 'Abbas, the chief of Bani Azyrg tribe sent a furious warning to Baghdad government, asking for Asad Allah's immediate release. Once again, the influence of *mumins* among public and great *mujtahids* reached sometimes to unpredictable levels. Sayyed Salih al-Hilli, it is said, was capable of pouring scorn even on great *mujtahids*.[217] However, it is true to state that there has always been a mutual interest between *mumins* and *mujtahids* to secure the support of the other. Thus, the real threat to *mujtahids*, however, was not born out of their religious counterparts but from the new arising class; that is *effendi* group. It is this group that brought into question the status of the '*ulama* and their role within the Shi'a community became increasingly under crucial attack.

Civil schools and Effendis

Until the beginning of the 20th century, leading notables and personals in Najaf (and of course the Iraqi Shi'a community) exclusively came from the religious '*ulama* (whether Arabs or Persians), *sadha* and tribal Shaikhs. However, the scene seems to have changed dramatically as the new effendi class emerged as the most active and rival

[216] Mahbuba, B, *Madhi al-Najaf*, ibid, vol, 2, p.307; Dekheel, 'A M, *Najafayat*, ibid, p.133.
[217] Al-Khalili, J, *Hakatha 'Araftaham*, vol, 1.p.108; Saleem, S M, *al-Chibayish*, pp.154.5.

faction in the city. This change affected the traditional status of *'ulama*, bringing, at least, their political authority into question.

Effendi (literally means a man wearing suit as an expression of their affection to the western culture) refers to 'an individual who had attained any Western education whatsoever, adopted Western dress, and deviated to some extent from traditional frameworks'.[218] *Effendiyya* in Iraq, however, as was the case in Egypt included even the semi educated, who graduated of primary and secondary schools, wore Western dress, interested in reading newspapers and had or thought of a state job. Most *effendiyya* originated from middle class families and resided in towns in particular.[219]

In fact, *effendi* was born out of the modernisation and the attachment to the western culture. The rising of this group has associated directly to the emerging of new nation-state, where the educated people monopolized the processes of building a bureaucratic governmental body. Individual affiliation with state's institutions, statesmen as well as political parties has become a major channel through which to obtain social mobilization. The emergence of this group seemingly brought forth some serious problems in Iraqi society. The *effendi* problem found its roots in the Ottoman period as *effendiyya* worked most within the Ottoman governmental administrative body. When they were stripped of their privileges soon after the fall of Baghdad to the new British governor, the *effendi* realized their real dilemma.[220] This explains to some extent the indignation which prevailed among this group towards the British, and hence the role assumed by *effendi* in the 1920 Revolution, shoulder to shoulder with the Shi'i *'ulama*.[221]

Unlike the Iraqi Sunni community, however, the *effendi* problem did not emerge in the

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[218] Eppel, M, The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958, *IJMES*, 30 (1998), p.229 pp.227-250.
[219] Eppel, M, Note about the term Effendiyya in the history of the Middle East, *IJMES*. 41 (2009), pp. 535-539.
[220] Al-Wardi, 'A, *Lamahat*, ibid, vol, 5, p.201; idem, *Dirasa*, ibid.p.312, pp.344-5.
[221] Al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid, vol, 5, p.201. See also Zubaida S. the Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq, *IJMES*, 34(2002) 205-215.p.207.

Shi'a areas on the same scale for two reasons. Firstly the proportion of *effendiyya* among the Shi'is was tiny due to the Ottoman policy of denying the Shi'is of government positions. Secondly and most importantly, was the general reluctance of Shi'is to work within the government staff, an idea that is rooted deeply in Shi'a beliefs. It was reported that, only one Najafi *effendi* was working within the Ottoman administration. Hamid Khan, a wealthy and educated young man who was born into an Indian emigrant family, had a position within the Ottoman governmental body in the city. Khan worked in late 1914 with the Ottomans and later on with the British as a clerk and an interpreter thanks to his proficiency in English, Hindi, Persian, Arabic and Turkish.[222]

If an *effendi* held no significant role in the Najafi context, their ideals and ideas were already on the air nonetheless, affected good number of traditional clerics, preachers, and poets. 'Ali al-Sharqi attacked the *effendi* group as they served only their own interests at the expense of the nation and country. Al-Sharqi indicated that they represented a mere continuation from the Ottoman era and adhered themselves for old regimes (the Ottoman system).[223] New political ideologies and thoughts seem to have penetrated the Najaf community by the dawn of the 20th century or perhaps earlier. As they succeeded in introducing the Ottoman constitution, the Young Turks, for instance, were thinking of extending their reformative activities to cover other parts of the empire. For this purpose, the Committee of Union and Progress sent its representative Thuraya Beg in 1908 to Mesopotamian provinces to set the first branches in Baghdad and Najaf. The first meeting was held in *Shaikh* Mirza Hussain's house in 'Amarah quarter, where Thuraya Beg met with Sayyed Muslim Zwain, *Shaikh* Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi, Sayyed Sa'id Kamal al-Din and *Shaikh* 'Ali al-Man'a. Addressing his speech

[222] Al-Khalili, J, ibid,vol, 1.p.41.
[223] Al-Sharqi, 'A. *Mousa'at al-Shaikh 'Ali Al-Sharqi*, Baghdad, 1989, vol.2.p.180. See the footnote in the same page. See the next chapter about 'Ali al-Sharqi and his views on Iraqi nationalism, p.91.

to the attendees, Thuraya Beg denounced the Sultan Abdulhamid II and he applauded the Constitution.[224]

No doubt, secular modern schools had been the real workshop that produced *effendis*. It is the new *madrassa* (school) that by and large presented the new generation of secular intellectuals who, in turn, took the lead in attacking old ideas and inspired new ones. For the young generation, civil education had been the new tool to rid outdated traditions and the means to achieve new social change. Eppel has stated that:

'The most direct and influential factor in the growth and expansion of the *effendiyya* was the establishment of the modern schools… the growth of the educational system, which provided local personnel with training for involvement in these changes, played the central role in the expansion of the *effendiyya*'.[225]

Najafis had realized early the importance of civil education and therefore established civil schools. In addition to two Iranian schools, there had been until 1918 only one secondary school in Najaf. After 1918, the British opened another school, which was to serve new students, among them, Sa'ad Salih, the prominent Najafi politician. Salih took the advantage of his early schooling to pursue later his studies in engineering.[226] Soon after the founding of the first Iraq government, a group of wealthy and educated Najafis backed by some Arab '*ulama* decided to open in 1921 another private elementary school called (*Al-Gharai*). This school in particular received special attention from Najaf's community and the Iraqi government, which denoted good

[224] See Tripp, C, ibid, pp.20-22; al-Asadi, ibid.pp.61-2; Atiyyah, G, ibid pp.52-54. Atiyyah does not mention the branch of this Committee in Najaf, though there are some who suggest that it was set up even before Baghdad. See further, al-Jabori. Abd al-Jabar: *al-Ahzab wa al-Jam'ayat al-Saiyasia fi al-Qatr al-'Iraqi 1908-1958*, Baghdad, 1977, pp.27-28; al-Turahi, ibid. pp.330-331. For different view, see Serkis, Ya'qub, *Mabahith 'Iraqiyya,* Baghdad, 1955, p.325.
[225] Eppel, M, The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958, *IJMES*, 30 (1998) p.232.
[226] For more details about Sa'ad Salih, see for example, al-Jabiri, S, *Sa'ad Salih wa Dawrah al-Siyasi fil Iraq*, Baghdad, 1997.

subsidies to it.[227] It is worth emphasizing the important role played by this school in advocating and spreading nationalist ideas in Najaf.[228]

What is striking, however, is that the pioneering generation of Shi'a intellectuals and most secular figures mostly came from a religious background. This group of *effendiyya* includes Sa'ad Salih (Minister of Interior during the Monarchy), Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (prominent poet and journalist), Hussain Murawah (Lebanese in origin studied in Najaf for about 15 years) and Muhammad Salih Bahr-ul'Ulum (poet and journalist) in Najaf, Salih Jabr (prime minister, March 1947 to January 1948), Fadhil al-Jamali (prime minister, September 1953 to March 1954, 'Abdul al-Karim al-Azri (a prominent economist and minister of finance in al-Jamali's government), and others.[229] Almost all these individuals had received their early education at religious institutions (*hawza*) or had a religious upbringing.

The emergence of the new form of intellectual out of the old generation of clergy has certainly associated with the spread of new political, social and religious ideas. Transformations of political and social views were bound to sever economic conditions that affected most *hawza* students during and after 1920s, pushing many of them out of their seminaries. Al-Jawahiri, Murawah and Muhammad Shararah, were few names of many Shi'a students, who abandoned their *hawza* learning for new emerging opportunities in political careers, journalism and so forth. Al-Jawahri pointed out that there had had a salient transformation in the meaning of privileges. He claims that financial base and possession of properties have increasingly become the criteria by which to be recognized as a leader. Religious education had no meaning any longer.[230]

Newspapers also played a major role in inculcating new ideas and concepts in the

[227] Ministry of Interior, *The Iraqi Directory*, Baghdad, 1936, p.423; Al-Hilali, A, *Tarikh al-Taleem fi al-Iraq fi 'Ahad al-Ahtilal al-Britani 1914-1921,* Baghdad, 1975, p. 86; Mahbuba, B, ibid, vol, 1, pp 146-7.
[228] Al-Asadi, H, ibid, pp 41-2 & 78-9. See next chapter.
[229] Ibid, p.236
[230] Al-Jawahri, M, *Dhikrayati*, Beirut, Dar al-Rafidain, 1988, vol, 1, p.45

minds of young people. Najafis began publishing their own papers and magazines bringing the first printing machine to the city in 1909. Al-Shahristani's famous magazine *al-'Alim* (Knowledge) was published there in addition to a Persian newspaper called *Najaf*. *Al-Furat,* for al-Shibibi, *al-Istiqlal* for Muhammad Abdul-Hussain, *al-Najaf* for Yousif Rujaib and *al-Hira* for Abd al-Mawla al-Turihi, are just few examples to mention of so many other newspapers that were published and circulated in Najaf.[231] As such, journalism created new opportunities for *effendiyya* as writing for newspapers and professional correspondents became in demand. New journalists set out to work independently in their own papers or as correspondents for other papers in Najaf and Baghdad. Yousif Rujaib and Muhammad 'Abdul-Hussain stood among the pioneering generation of *effendiyya* in Najaf, who endeavored to develop new Iraqi Shi'a identity through combining Shi'a sense with the emerging Iraqi nationalism. It was among this group that national and socialist ideas generated and became more popular in Najaf.

Also, the Iraqi Revolution of 1920 brought forth a new kind of clergymen who functioned as mediators between illiterate people and the traditional religious authority. The religio-intellectual personals, as we may call them, took the leading responsibility of publishing revolutionary pamphlets and newspapers, reciting national poems and delivering speeches among masses. Muhammad Baqir al-Shibibi, the editor of *al-Furat* newspaper, practiced his role as a national poet, religious *Shaikh* and political preacher during the 1920 Revolution.[232]

No less significant was the role played by poets as poetry was an effective tool for propagating new ideas among Najafis. It is safe to argue that Najaf has produced poets

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[231] About publishing in Najaf, see Michael, W, A, *Printing in Mesopotamia from its origins until 1914*. MA Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, USA, 1973, pp.20-47; Afas, B, F, 'Tarikh al-Tiba'a al-'Iraqayya min Bidayataha hata al-Harb al-'Alamayya al-Awla' , *Al-Mored*, vol, 10.No.3-4.1981. (67-84), p.83; al-Asadi, ibid, pp.40-41; Mahbuba, B, pp. 174, & 178-183; al-Asadi.pp.369-70; Al-Khaqani, Ali, *Tarikh al-Sahafa fi al-Najaf*, 1969, Baghdad. pp. 4-6.

[232] 'Atiyyah, G, ibid.pp.337-8; al-Asadi, H, ibid.p.369; Kamal al-Din, M.A, *Ma'lumat wa Mushahadat fi al-Thaurat al-'Iraqiyat al-Kubra li-Sanat 1920*, Baghdad, 1971, p.71.

as no other city in the Arab or Islamic world did. It has been stated that Najaf alone had given rise to more than 200 and 250 poets in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries respectively. A combination of factors made Najaf an appropriate atmosphere for poetry.[233] Giving an extensive attention to Arabic language in *hawza*, conducting weekly literature meetings (*al-Majalis al-Adabaya al-Asboua'yya*) held by '*ulama* and notables, organizing religious ceremonies such as 'Ashura days, the very traditional character of the city itself and its literary inherited heritage of Kufa and al-Hira, all these and other factors have preserved the Arabic character of the city and stimulated its intellectual innovation.[234]

Besides their role as defenders of their homeland, Najafi poets in many times disparaged reactionary trends and trivial religious concerns, calling for reformation and opening the doors for new forms of discourse. Time and again, most rebellious poets came from among the minor religious men of *hawza* (*mumins*) who found interest in new ideas. In 1925, Shaikh 'Abdul Sahib al-Khudhari, an adamant adherent to pan-Arab ideology and known for his keen interest in composing national poems and anthems attacked Ja'far al-Khalili for what he considered a *Shu'bi* intention as the later prevented the *Fatawat* students of *al-Ghari* School from welcoming King Faisal, when he visited Najaf. This incident, among many others, pinpoints to deep ethnic and national tension between the Arabs and Persians within Najaf. 'Abdul al-Sahib al-Dujaili, another pan-Arab advocator, derogated in one of his poems the religious '*ulama* for their 'greedy', pushy and snobby characteristics. 'Ulama, according to al-Dujaili, are self- proclaimed pious, lovers of money and always seek leadership.[235]

Obviously, such poets and figures broke with old traditions and condemned superficial customs in society. In this sense, they claimed the responsibility of defending

[233]Al-Mousawi, A, *Harakat al-Sha'ar fi al-Najaf al-Ashraf wa Atwarih Khilal al-Qirn al-Rabi'a ashar al-Hijri*, Beirut, 1988, p.667.
[234] Jamal al-Din, M, *Al-Diwan*, (the introduction), pp.12-30; al-Khaqani, 'A, *Shua'ra al-Ghari*, vol, 1.pp.15-27; al-Khalili, J, ibid, vol,1,p.316
[235] Al-Khaqani, 'A, ibid, vol, 5, pp.425, 427, 438.

‘oppressed people’ such as peasants and workers, aspiring of a more just society. Some scholars have observed ‘that the majority of the poets interested in the rural problem have one thing in common; they all come from the region of the Middle Euphrates, especially al-Najaf’.This interest, he continues, was ‘due not so much to ties of blood or links of close relationship, which cannot be established, as to proximity and daily intercourse’.[236] Muhammad Salih Bahr-ul‘Ulum, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahri, Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi and ‘Ali al-Sharqi were the most prominent poets who spoke on behalf of peasants and workers. In fact, the rural problem had a profound influence upon intellectuals and poets who almost attached themselves to new political ideologies. The misery of *falahin* (peasantry) in the rural areas led intellectuals and poets to express their solidarity with peasants, calling for better conditions. Formulated in new forms, this attitude, however, has brought these voices close to secular and radical thinking, withdrawing them from their traditional upbringings.

The significance of this trend and its political weight became clear to the extent that one British officer predicted that this group will constitute ‘a major problem for Iraq’.[237] Troubeck, the British Ambassador pointed out that ‘the growing numbers and social influence of the effendis’ (particularly Shii effendis) in the beginning of 1950s, were ‘crucial factors in the ‘real’ political situation *(as)* they felt excluded from power by Pashas and Shaikhs, among whom Sunnis seemed to retain overall control.[238]

It could be argued that the birth of secular trend among Shi’a intellectuals was a direct result of anti-clerical sentiments unfolded within Shi’a community first, developed thereafter into one or another political orientation that appeared during the 1930s. This orientation was to be clearly defined later by both Marxist and nationalist literature as a new kind of personal, social and political affiliation.

Conclusion

[236] ‘Izzedien,Y , *Poetry and Iraqi Society, 1900-1945*, Baghdad, 1962, p.34
[237] Main, E, *Iraq, From Mandate to Independence*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1935.p.235
[238] Elliot, M, *Independent Iraq, the Monarchy & British Influence*, 1942-1958, p.105.

Najaf has had an exceptional and unique setting within Iraqi society. Being the home of Imam ‘Ali’s tomb and the *hawza* granted the city special status in the Shi’a mind. Students and ‘*ulama* from different backgrounds made the small city their settlement. In the course of its history, foreign students and ‘*ulama* constituted part of the city fabric. Arab families, on the other hand, have always formed the majority of Najaf's people, holding the core of its economic, social let alone religious activities.

Najaf's community witnessed a visible change in the 19th century due to a great wave of Persian immigrants. This affected not only the structure of Najaf society, where foreign (mainly Persian) elements developed into a considerable minority, but mainly the transformation of economic, social and, above all, religious actitivities into its hands. It is not a coincidence that Arab ‘*ulama* and merchants gave way for their Persian counterparts simultaneously.

The three decades spanning between 1890 and 1920 witnessed a great deal of political involvement on the part of the Shi’i *‘ulama* in Iran and Iraq after a long period of aloofness and non-intervention. Political aloofness has obviously been associated with the institutionalization of *marja’iyya* while political activism was spurred on by external factors (the Tobacco Revolution, the Constitutional in Iran, the Jihad Campaign of 1914/15 and the 1920 Revolution in Iraq). The 1920 Iraqi Revolution was a pivotal juncture in the history of Shi’a *marja’iyya* as the great *‘ulama* chose to lead a quietist life afterwards in Iraq.

As religious teaching in *hawza* declined, leaving dim and unsecured prospect, the Shi’a young generations directed their attention to civil education in the hope of achieving change. New ideas and thoughts penetrated the *hawza* itself and contributed to the steady decrease of *hawza* students. By the mid of 1930s, Najaf became a home of

indignant clerics and aspirant poets, who leaned themselves to new political ideologies and groupings as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Najaf and creating the Iraqi Monarchy 1921-1958

After four centuries of foreign rule, Iraq proclaimed finally its own status as a nation state in 1921. Forming the government was the first step, which had nearly come into existence when the British, after the Iraqi Revolution of 1920, felt a pressing need to cease their direct rule and switch to new kind of client government. Both the Iraqis and the British made a last minute agreement that Faisal ibn al-Hussain would be the head of this new state. After landing in Basrah, Faisal made Najaf his first destination, paying a visit to the Shrine of Imam ‘Ali in 1921. Najaf celebrated the new king, as he became a symbol of this nascent nation-state. Visiting Najaf was more than a rare gesture as Faisal well knew Najaf's status and the real power that lay there. However, the moment that marked the birth of the new Iraqi state also signaled its enduring crisis especially for Shi'is majority.

I shall address in this chapter three main questions. First: how did Shi'is in Iraq shift loyalties from the *marja'iyya*, which represented for a long time the locus of power of the Shi'a community, towards new political formations (political parties)? Second: what explains the appeal of secular movements to Shi'is and what determined their political leanings to Arab nationalism or Communism? Third: how did the Shi'i ‘*ulama* respond to this challenge and how did they attempt to build a new bridge with their followers?

Britain and the new state

British Administration in Iraq ordered the formation of an Iraqi government in 1921. Sir Percy Cox commissioned Abd-ul Rahman al-Naqib as the first Iraqi prime minister with eight other ministers. The Shi'i ‘*ulama* adopted a hostile attitude towards the British Administration, however, Cox made a surprising a move when he selected al-Naqib for the first Iraqi government, giving the lion's share to the Sunni minority with no genuine

Shi'a participation.[239] The Sharifian Officers who served during the Arab Revolt of 1916 in Mecca as assistants and commanders under al-Hussain ibn 'Ali and later on with his son Faisal in Syria were to dominate the Iraqi political landscape until the beginning of 1940s.

From the outset, Faisal noticed the paradoxes of his new state. While the Shi'is made up the majority of his people, his government composed of only Sunni individuals. Hence, Faisal relentlessly attempted to balance the situation using diplomacy and his charismatic skills as well as his special relationship with the Shi'i *'ulama*. Despite the fact that Faisal did not make any significant breakthrough, his personal prestige and efforts were among the main factors that eased the discontent and frustration, among the Shi'is of Iraq. Hoping to address the real dilemma of Iraq, King Faisal, however, wrote in his memorandum that:

'In Iraq, there is still … unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of any patriotic ideal, imbued with religious traditions.., connected by no common tie... Iraq is a Kingdome governed by Arab Sunni government based on the remnants of the Ottoman rule… I do not want to justify the attitude of the majority of illiterate Shi'i, reporting what I have heard thousands of times … that taxes levied from Shi'is and death for them and positions only allotted for the Sunnis. What then left for the Shi'i? I say with a heart full of sorrows that there is no Iraqi nation yet in Iraq but there are human entities, devoid of any national idea'.[240]

This picture continued to determine the political scene in Iraq for the whole 20th century, affecting both the formation of the ruling elite and the ruled masses. While the Sunnis cemented their position as a privileged small ruling group, the Iraqi Shi'is crystallized their efforts to stand up against the Baghdad authority here and there.

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[239] See for example, Al-Hassani, A A, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqayya*, vol, 1.pp.15-17. Cox, in fact, suggested later that Shi'i participation was required to keep the representation of all Iraqi components. Thus, Muhammad Mahdi Bahr-ul 'Ulum was appointed as minister of education.

[240] See the full Memorandum of King Faisal in, al-Hasani, 'A A, and ibid, vol, 3.pp.313-319. Also Batatu, H, ibid.p.28; Spector Simon, R, *Iraq between the Two World Wars, the Militarist Origins of Tyranny*, Columbia University Press- New York- 2004, pp.3-4.The first paragraph taken from Batatu and the rest is my translation.

Iraq: the dilemma of nationalist state

Evidently, the formation of the Iraqi nation state resulted in an unstable and unharmonized society as the processes that created Iraq as a state brought about what considered as an 'administrative nationalism' rather than a genuine nationalism.[241]

Thus, it is true that Iraq had been transformed from mere three scattered *Walayats* (provinces) (Baghdad, Mosul and Basrah) into a new single state, the nationalization process itself caused perpetual divisions among the components of Iraqi society however. The Shi'is of Iraq, who were subject to discrimination and oppressive policies under the Ottomans, now found themselves victims of the new coercive nation state governed by fellow Iraqis. Instead of making complaints against the Ottomans or the British, the Shi'is now ought to turn the blame to their Iraqi masters.[242] Nationalism, in this sense, was imposed on Iraqi society according to the terms of the ruling elite rather than to suit the varied segments of Iraqi people, let alone representing their real needs. Fanon accurately articulated that once nationalists won the war of independence, 'the undifferentiated nationalism which the colonial intellectual has carried to his people begins to lose its impact. The apparent social harmony, which has prevailed during the anti-colonial struggle, gives way to a variety of antagonistic social realities'.[243] What is more important, 'in the post-colonial period, nationalism, once simply anti-colonialist, now becomes the integrative ideology of the ruling national bourgeoisie… the national bourgeoisie takes nationalism to mean the transfer to themselves of the privileges formerly enjoyed by the colonizers'.[244] Thus, Arab nationalism in Iraq has been useful political glue used by the Sunni elite for internal pragmatic exigencies and an

[241] This term coined by W, Sulbach, cited in Tibi, B, *Arab Nationalism. A Critical Study*. 1981p.19.
[242] See for example, Rear, M, *Intervention, Ethnic Conflict and State-Building in Iraq. A Paradigm for the Post-Colonial State*, New York, 2008, pp.149-162; Ibrahim, F, *Al-Taefayya wa al-Sayasah*, ibid, pp.188-91; Nakash, Y, ibid, ch.4.

[243] Fanon, F, cited in Tibi, B, ibid, p.29.
[244] Ibid.pp.29-30.

instrument for manipulation to gain political power, instead of building stable nation state.

The centralization of Iraqi state not only empowered the national capital over other regions in the country but enhanced considerably its control over national economic resources. This explains the wave of immigrants that moved from the southern provinces to Baghdad.[245] It was not coincidence that between mid 1920s and end of 1940s, political opposition, particularly the ICP, gained roots especially within this uprooted section due to economic disadvantages and political marginalization. At the same time, these political and economic shifts marginalized the traditional role played by religious *'ulama* and local dignitaries in other cities notably Najaf. Baghdad rather than Najaf became the principal destination of Shi'a youth yearning for betterment of their social and economic circumstances. Najafi families like Al al-Jawahiri, al-Shibibi, al-Qamosi and many more were also seeking new opportunities in higher education, economic prosperity and social status leading to their departure from Najaf to resettle in Baghdad.

The tendency to monopolise the Iraqi state demonstrated itself best in both the elitist education system and Iraqi army. Both these institutions remained controlled by the Sunni ruling elite until the removal of the monarchy in 1958.

From its inception, the formation of the army was regarded as a unifying force and an indispensable apparatus in the hands of the ruling elite in Iraq. The Iraqi army was thus created at a very early stage not only to balance or overcome the assets of the armed tribesmen (especially in the south and Euphrates region where the majority of Shi'i tribesmen lived) but also to support the minority government. Salih notes that:

[245] Sluglett, M.F & Sluglett,P, *Iraq since 1958,from Revolution to Dictatorship*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2001, pp.33-4; Batatu, H, *Old Social Classes*, ibid,pp.465-82; Marr, P, *The Modern History of Iraq*, pp.30-1, 62-3;

'The elites of the dominant ethnic core group would engage in efforts to maximize their control within the domains of the territorial state based on a particular version of the internal political order. Demands from groups other than the dominant ethnic core group, that is to say groups other than the Sunni Arab, were to be suppressed by military means, a practice pertaining to state–building and the mode of imposing political authority in Iraq'.[246]

Since then, Shi'a presence within the Iraqi military has always been meager notably among the higher ranks. Very few Shi'i officers succeeded in breaking the barriers created by those policies, a fact that made the army a very Sunni club. The Iraqi army, no doubt, became a major player within internal Iraqi affairs as politics became an open arena for military officers, who increasingly possessed the power to determine the fate of politicians. Sunni officers thus held the fate of the Iraqi state in their hands.

Despite the fact that the education system that was established in Iraq had been the main tool that was meant to accelerate the nationalist consciousness in Iraq, the system itself contributed greatly to undermine rather than consolidate the integration of the varied components of Iraqi society. Zubaida noticed that 'a common educational system, limited literacy, and state employment did lead to the formation of an intelligentsia and a political class with common components of cultural outlook and an imagination of the nation'. Zubaida observed, however, that in the case of Iraq 'the mutations of concepts of the religious community are articulated onto that of the nation and enter the field of nationalist contestations'.[247]

Al-Husri and Arab nationalism in Iraq

In fact, the education system had been the main instrument that fortified the position of Arab nationalist ideology in Iraq in favor of the Sunnis. Although, the Ministry of Education was mainly filled by Shi'i ministers, none of the personnel who held this position had achieved any real change. Hibbat al-Din al-Shihristani (1921/22), 'Abdul

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[246] Salih, K, *State-Making, Nation-Building and the Military: Iraq 1941-1958*. Goteborg University, Sweeden-1996.p.154; Kadhim, Abbas, *Reclaiming Iraq,*ibid, pp.152-4.

[247] Zubaida, S, ibid.p.206.

Hussain al-Chalabi (1922/3), Shaikh Muhammad Hassan Abu al-Mahasin (1923/24), Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi (1924/25), or Sayyed 'Abdul Mahdi al-Mintafji (1926/27), all of them had left no real effect, partly because of their limited experience.[248] However, this was mainly due to the fact that the man in charge of education policy was Sati'a al-Husri, an ex-Ottoman official who converted from Ottomanism to Arabism as his new political creed. No man could perfectly embody Orwell's words better than al-Husri, who is regarded as a 'great national leader, or the founder of nationalist movements' but did not even belong to the country he glorified. He was an outright foreigner and had no experience of Iraqi society.[249]

Appointed in 1921 as Director of Education, al-Husri employed Arab teachers from the Fertile Crescent to work in Iraqi schools. Al-Husri realized the importance of teaching Arab history to propagate an Arab nationalist consciousness. History, for al-Husri, comes second after language as a principal element of Arab nationalism. 'Every nation', al-Husri wrote, 'must forget part of its history, and only remember what helps it'.[250] Despite his extensive knowledge and experience, al-Husri, however, failed to properly estimate the complexities of the Iraqi society; and ultimately only paid lip service, if any, to the Shi'a concerns.[251]

Muhammad Makiya, an Iraqi Shi'a architect, narrates in his memoir a very striking contradiction between history lessons that he received and his religious doctrine. According to the Iraqi national history of the 1930s, Arab history was full of glorious

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[248] See for more details about the education policy, Reeva, S, S, *Iraq between the Two World Wars, the Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology*, Columbia University Press. New York-1986, pp.69-105.

[249] Orwell, George, *Decline of the English Murder and other Essays*, Penguin Books, 1983, pp.163-166. Al-Husri was not capable in his early days in Iraq of speaking Arabic and according to Cleveland he'retained a heavy Turkish accent'. Cleveland, W, *The Making of An Arab Nationalist, Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Satti al-Husri*, Princeton-New Jersey-1971.pp.65-6. Also, see, Teekhonofa, *Sati'a al-Husri Raed al-Minha al-Ilmani fi al-Fikr al-Qawmi al-'Arabi*, Moscow- 1987.19.

[250] Cited in Hourani, A, *Arabic Thought*, ibid, p.314.

[251] Al-Husri himself relates that he was unfamiliar with the traditions of Arab tribes of Iraq and relates how King Faisal was familiar with local culture. See, *Safahat min al-Madhi al-Qareeb*, Beirut.1948.pp.14-5. For more details about the dispute between al-Jawahiri and al-Husri see, Sha'ban, A.H, *Al-Jawahiri, Jadal al-Sha'er wal Hayat*, Beirut-1997, p.183.

and magnificent pages with no worldly conflicts amongst Muslims. Furthermore, Umayyad history, in particular, was depicted as the heyday of Arab civilization with the exceptional experience Muslims that towered over other nations. On the contrary to these lessons, Makiya explains, 'we were aware of the atrocities that were perpetrated by the same Caliphs against the family of the Prophet Muhammad'. This contradiction, Makiya adds, 'participated in widening the gap among the Iraqi people, between Shi'is and Sunnis'.[252]

Al-Husri, in effect, was denounced for adopting anti-Shi'i attitudes through directing unfavorable policies against the Shi'a community at both theoretical and practical levels. In addition to his nationalist plan that targeted the history curriculum, al-Husri manifested clear anti-Shi'i policies. Al-Azri condemns al-Husri for cancelling the Department of Education assigned for the Middle Euphrates Region (where the majority of Shi'is lives) in 1927, contending that al-Husri's excuse was misleading. The reason behind the cancellation of this position, according to al-Azri, was al-Husri's personal whim and nothing else.[253]

The secular and sectarian attitude of Sati'a al-Husri not only made him personally vulnerable for Shi'i critics but also his entire nationalist project. We shall see later how this sensitive issue (anti-Shi'ism) was re-used again by the ICP against nationalists particularly in the Shi'i regions, viewing Arab nationalist ideology incompatible with the ideals of the Iraqi majority, particularly the Shi'a community. Al-Husri's role was thus brought to its limits in mid 1920s, paving the way for Muhammad Fadhil al-Jamali, a Shi'i nationalist, yet with a liberal mindset and a Western education, to open a new

[252] Makaya.M, *Khawatir al-Sineen*, Dar al-Saqi, London-2005, p.104. About utilizing Arab history by nationalists, see Ajami, F, *The Arab Predicament, Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*, Cambridge University Press, USA, 1992, pp.55-6.

[253] Al-Azri, 'A, *Tarikh fi Dhikrayat al-Iraq 1930-1958*, vol.1.p.29. Al-Husri defended that there was no one who could fill the position. See also idem, *Mushkilat al-Hukam fi al-Iraq*, pp.191-248. See further about al-Husri, Tibi, B, ibid. pp. 99-152; Cleveland, W, ibid, pp.68-73; Choueiri, Y M, *Arab Nationalism, A History, Nation and State in the Arab World*, Chapter 4, pp.101-124 2000 and Kelidar. A, The Shii Imami Community and Politics in the Arab East, *ME S*, vol,19, No.1,1983, pp 3-16.

window of opportunity for Shi’i youth. During his period and especially after his appointment as Minister of Education in 1933-1934, al-Jamali introduced new measures that attempted to balance the educational system in Iraq. To this end, he supported establishing a new secondary school in Najaf staffed with teachers from Syria and Palestine; formed new directors of education in the Shi’i provinces and selected some Shi’a students to study abroad. For this reason, al-Jamali was criticized for adopting what has been dubbed a ‘Shi‘i policy’. Al-Jamali however, was a staunch believer in pan-Arabism, hence he continued al-Husri’s nationalist project in the Iraqi education system, yet with a ‘Shi’i flavor’.[254] Not surprisingly, Arab nationalist ideas began to receive more attention from educated Shi’is.

Baghdad and the challenge of opposition

Under the new wave of political, cultural and economic developments, two important, though separated changes took place in the beginning of the 1940s, leading to draw a new picture of the Iraqi political scene. The failure of Rashid ‘Ali al-Kailani’s coup in 1941, unleashed a swift yet visible change among the ruling elite. As Marr noted ‘the remaining wartime cabinets drew far more heavily on the Shi’a and the Kurds, who for the first time equally balanced or together sometimes outnumbered the Arab Sunnis in the cabinet. This circumstance provided an opportunity for emergence of new political figures and a younger generation among the Shi’a and the Kurds’.[255] After two decades of undiluted Sunni domination over political positions, Shi’i figures rose to the political realm as prime ministers and holders of important positions. Consequently, Salih Jabr, Fadhil al-Jamali and ‘Abdul Karim al-Azri, to name a few, came to form part of the Iraqi ruling elite. Thanks to their western qualifications, the Iraqi political game had

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[254] See Reeva,S.S, *Iraq between the Two World Wars*, ibid pp.75-114; Marr, P, The Development of a Nationalist Ideology in Iraq, 1920-1941, *MW*, vol, LXXV,NO.1,1985, pp (85-101); Shikara, Ahmad, A.R, *Iraqi Politics 1921-1941, the Interaction between Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy*.pp.117-124.

[255] Marr, P, *The Modern History of Iraq*, ibid, p.58.

become more accessible to Shi'i individuals. It is interesting that while a good number of Sunni politicians were speaking English in the beginning of 1920s and 1930, the first generation of the Shi'a politicians lacked any individual who was capable to do so.[256]

Most important, that loyalty and allegiance to tribe and religious community has increasingly dwindled and became less apparent than allegiance to political formations. Between the founding of the first Iraqi government and the beginning of War World II, more than two-dozen political parties, active associations and intellectual organizations were established. These groups ranged from authorized moderate parties to extremist national clubs and anti-imperialism communist groups.[257] Clearly, affiliation to political parties had become a distinct feature of Iraqi social life and almost conditioned by social, economic and political motivations. Political participation had become a significant enterprise especially, but not exclusively for educated people who found a new space for expressing their views and thoughts. In addition, affiliation to a specific party had been a good means to gain access to governmental jobs. Many people deemed party membership as the only way to guarantee a job in the governmental institutions particularly within the ruling parties after the steady increase in Iraqi oil revenues and new sectors of recruitment.[258]

On the contrary to the old kind of parties, which drew membership according to religious or regional lines, new political parties have developed, basing their affiliation on a mere ideological appeal. This political transformation had affected both social structure and religious affiliations as it made a break with what deemed as 'the politics

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[256] See for example about Shi'i personalities, EQ 1012/2, Appendix, No.16, Leading Personalities in Iraq, No.154.Confidential 1 July 1950.

[257] In fact, Islamic movements in Iraq were the less important groups during this period in comparison with the communist and nationalist groups. For different view, see Keddie, N R, Ideology, Society and the State in Post-Colonial Muslim Societies, in (editors) Halliday.F & Alavi, H, State *and Ideology in the Middle Eastern and Pakistan*, London-1988, pp.9-30.

[258] FO, EQ 1016/32, No.4, the Internal Situation in Iraq: Sir J. Troutbeck to Sir W. Churchill. (Received June 29, No.108. Confidential, Baghdad June 22, 1953; 'Aliwi, H, H, *al-Ahzab al-Syasiyya fi al-Iraq Secret and Public*, 2001, pp.53-97.

of notables'.[259] Accordingly, parties like 'the National Democrats, the Communists, the Baathists and the Independence (*Istiqlal*) Party were primarily ideological formations, although regional and kinship networks may have played some part in the organization and support in some of them. On the other hand, the establishment parties under the monarchy were clearly parties of patronage, clientelism and tribalism'.[260] On the other hand, a parallel dramatic shift occurred within the composition of the Iraqi opposition parties. This is to say that the Shi'a element clearly increased within both the Communist and Arab nationalist groups alike. This coincided with transformation from tribal and religious loyalties to new types of political allegiances. Thus, the old Shi'i religious community that characterized to a great extent by one communal bond and dominated socially by religious figures has given away for new forms of political associations and groupings.

Najaf and the Arab nationalist movement in Iraq

Of these groups, nationalist movements in particular symbolised the modern history of Iraq as they correspond closely to the very processes of building the Iraqi nation-state. Probably for this reason, the story of Arab nationalism in Iraq has always been linked to the ex-Sharifian Arab Sunni Officers. This story, it is argued, began with the forming of the first nationalist groupings of *al-'Ahd* (Convention) and *Haras al-Istiqlal* (Guardian of Independence), which are considered as the 'Founding Fathers' of Arab nationalism in Iraq. Arab nationalistic ideas, according to this narrative, were unknown and may be to some regard alien to Shi'i people due to their geography and the influence of the Persian *'ulama*, some even pointing to the deep-rooted hatred for the Arabs.[261]

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[259] Zubaida, S, 'Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics', in '*The Iraqi Revolution of 1958. The Old Social Classes* Revisited, London.1991.p.199.
[260] Zubaida, S, ibid, p.199.
[261] See for example, Tauber, E, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements*, London-1993, Frank Cass, p.1, pp.212-36. Many studies indicated that *Hars al-Istiqlal*, which alone contained both Sunni and Shi'i members, was more active and successful in propagating nationalist ideas. See for example, Eich, T, The Role of Traditional Religious Scholars in Iraqi Politics from the Young Turk Period until 1920, the example of Yusuf al-Suwaydi, in '(editor) Schuman.C:

Two things rendered this inaccurate stereotype to be the prevailing one. Firstly, most writers (Arab or Western scholars) who adopted this argument tend to reiterate the same narrative without paying any real consideration or attention to early Shi'a nationalist literature. Secondly and most importantly, the story of the Shi'a nationalist trend has been by and large drowned out by the rising Shi'a Islamist movement, which seems to have been born out of the fierce confrontation with the nationalist current. However, careful reading of the early religious-political statements, prose and poems that appeared in Najaf at the turn of the 20th century would bring a researcher to a firm conclusion that the common view is far from the truth. [262]

Thus, instead of this common stereotype, I here suggest firstly a new interpretation for Najaf's role in the history of Arab nationalist movement, and secondly a new historical categorization for the movement itself in Iraq. According to this category, I then identify four distinct phases for Arab nationalist groups rather than one monolithic current with homogeneous characteristics.

Nationalist ideas were initially advocated by '*ulama* in Najaf during the first stage as an expression of their spontaneous and non organized sentiments along with the primitive tendency of Arab nationalism in the Fertile Crescent. This short phase occupied the period between the beginning of the 20th century and 1920. This phase was to be interrupted however by the imposition of the Sharifian Sunni elite in power, indicating the beginning of the second period of the Arab nationalist era. As we noticed, the second stage (between 1921 and 1941) witnessed a secular nationalist trend imbued with a clear anti-Shi'i mood, the theories of which were set out by Sati'a al-Husri and

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Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East, Ideology and Practice', SOAS-Routledge-London, 1st published 2010.pp.16-30; Vinogradov, A, The 1920 Revolt in Iraq, ibid; Tauber, E, ibid; al-Hassani, A A, *Al-Thawrah*, ibid.pp.57-60

[262] For such stereotype about Shi'i negative attitude towards Arab nationalism, see foe example, Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p.102; idem, *Iraq since 1958*.p.194. See also, Dawisha, A, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, From Triumph to Despair*, pp.86-92 & 114; Nakash, Y, ibid. For a Shi'i nationalist counter view, see al-'Alawi, H, *al-Shi'a wal Dawlah al-Qawmayya fi al-'Iraq*, 2nd updated edition (n.p.-1990).

put in effect by the governing Sunni elite. Starting from the mid 1940s until 1963, however, a third phase could be distinguished with the rise of Shi'i elements among the Arab nationalists. During this period, Arab nationalism became more Islamic and less secular; the fact that attracted more Shi'i followers. The year 1963 might be regarded as a breaking point between the rise of Shi'a elements and their low participation in the Ba'th party. The third period ended in 1963 with the ascent of 'Abdul Salam 'Arif and remained so until the toppling of Saddam's regime in April 2003.

Najaf and the roots of Arab nationalism: Islam and Arabism

It is well known that revitalizing Arab culture had been at the heart of the Arab nationalist project in the Fertile Crescent countries in the late 19th century. Primarily, this movement began as a cultural and intellectual innovation focusing on reviving the Arabic language and history in order to mold a new sense of united Arab consciousness. Consequently, this Arab consciousness came out of this cultural Renaissance particularly amidst the political confrontation between the Turkification policies and the nascent Arab idea. Hourani observed that national sentiments emerged first among:

'leaders in the religious families of the great cities, who had managed to preserve their wealth and social position under the protection of the religious system, held local religious offices and so were linked with the religious hierarchy throughout the empire, and often had the privileged position accorded to *ashraf*, descendants of the Prophet. In such families the sciences of the Arabic language were treasured and handed down, as a necessary introduction to the sciences of religion; pride in Arab origin…was blended with a sense of what the Arabs had done for Islam'.[263]

As we observed earlier in chapter two, Najaf had for centuries been one of the very few centres that preserved high-standards of Arabic language and culture. This marked and was reflected to a great extent on its religious studies, intellectual tradition as well as

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[263] Hourani, A, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, Oxford University Press-1962, p.261. See also, Khadduri, M, *Political Trends in the Arab World, the Role of Ideas and Ideals in Politics*, Greenwood Press Publishers-1983-USA, pp.15-27.

future political aspirations. Proud of its Arabic character, Najaf along with its *hawza* maintaind Arabic as the only language for its studies and research. Even for non-Arab *'ulama*, comprehending Arabic has been one of the principal tools to obtain knowledge, let alone reach the level of *ijtihad*. Because of this religious and intellectual atmosphere, Arabism and Islam were closely interwoven as the main elements of Najaf's culture. In contrast to the Turkish influences throughout the Arab East and the French in North Africa, Najaf seems to have been less touched by non-Arab influences as Arabic studies were maintained through *hawza* seminars, cultural festivals and a high degree of Shi'a religious sentiments. No wonder, the reformist calls of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, 'Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi and Rashid Rida, were voiced and echoed in Najaf. For al-Afghani, 'Abduh, al-Kawakibi and Rida, the Arabs viewed as having special role within Islam as they were the bearers of Islam to other nations. Arabic language represents a unifying element amongst even non-Arab Muslims. The message of this call was clear: renovating Islam was a historical mission assigned to the Arab nation.[264] Likewise, Najafi '*ulama* like Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi, Hibat al-Din al-Shihristani, Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi, Muhammad Hassan Abu al-Mahasin, Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita and 'Abdul al-Karim al-Jaza'eri and many others insisted on Arabism as the spirit and substance of Islam. This clearly manifested in their sympathy towards Islamic and Arab causes.

For example, Najafi *'ulama*, reacted furiously towards the Italian invasion of Libya in August 1911. Najafis even formed a committee to collect money for the Libyan *Mujahidin*, and Najafi poets and '*ulama* denounced this plain western aggression and called upon Iraqis and Arabs to help their Libyan brothers. A *fatwa* was issued by Najafi '*ulama* advocating Muslims to prepare for jihad. Such enthusiasm for Islamic

[264] Nadhmi, W, Shi'iat al-Iraq wa Qadhayat al-Qawmayat al-Arabaya, al-Door al-Tareekhi Qabla al-Istiqlal, pp157-189, in (group of editors): *Dirasat fi al-Qawmayat al-Arabayya wal* Wahda, Beirut, first edition, 1984. For more details about al-Afghani, 'Abduh and other ideas, see Hourani, A, ibid.pp.103-60; Khadduri.M, *Political Trends in the Arab* World, ibid, pp.15-27.

causes undoubtedly reflected a shared common consciousness, which in turn, paved the way for spreading Arab nationalism.[265]

Najaf's leading role in the 1920 Iraqi Revolution was briefly mentioned earlier. This role made the small city a focal point of subsequent political developments. Recalling the memories of the bloody confrontation with the Turks in 1916 and later with the British in 1918 and 1920, Najaf may have sought to present a new formula fit for the new Iraqi political situation. Regardless of a small number of pro-Ottoman scholars, the majority of Najafi '*ulama* (Arab and non-Arab) were in favour of an independent Iraq with an Arab and Islamic identity and governed by an Arab prince.[266]

Shi'a nationalists: Arabism or Iraqism?

The announcement of Iraq as an independent state released a new kind of nationalist euphoria in the Holy City. For example, when Rida Shah, the Minister of Defence in Iran visited Najaf in 1925, the pupils of *al-Ghari* School were reluctant to welcome him as a sign of discontent over the recent annexation of *Arabistan* (Khuzistan), the Arab province, to Iran. Students were persuaded to participate in the demonstration provided they only hold the Iraqi flag. However, once they entered the *Suk* (market), they noticed an Iranian shopkeeper who made a huge portrait for the Shah with his feet standing on both Iran and Iraq. The students attacked the store and destroyed the portrait. *Al-Ghari* School, which was dubbed a major fortress of Arab nationalist activities in the city, was the first private school in Najaf that was founded by Najaf's nationalist elite in 1921. This group included mainly Arab Najafis like Sa'id Kamal al-Din, Sayyed Yahya al-Haboobi, Sayyed Karim Sayyed Salman, Muhsin al-Haj 'Ajina, Amin Shamsa and

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[265]Al-Mafraji,A.H, *Harakat al-Tayar al-Islahi al-Najafi 1908-1933*, MA Dissertation submitted to the College of Literature, Kufa University, Iraq-2002, pp.227-238; Nadhmi, W, *Shi'i at al-Iraq*, ibid. See the *fatwa* in *al-Mosem*, No.11, vol.3-1990.p.1002.

[266] See for example, Tauber, E, *the Arab Movements in World War I*. London-1993, 1st published-Frank Cass-GB, pp.30-2, pp.57-100; Abu Tabikh, M, *al-Mabade wal Rijal*. Damascus-H 1357, pp.11-7; al-Hassani, A A, *Al-Thawrah al-'Iraqayya al-Kuubra*, pp.102-3; al-Asadi, H, ibid.pp.64-5, 94-9.

many others. Further the school was supported by the then, Minister of Information, the Najafi politician, intellectual and poet, Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi.[267] Like their counterparts in the Fertile Crescent who found themselves outraged by Turkish nationalist ideas and policies, the outlook of Arab nationalists in Najaf was greatly formed and shaped by the ethnic tension between the Arab and the Persian communities in the city. Although these unprompted sentiments were expressed or displayed in daily interactions, they were to take a systematic form later under the influence of political and cultural developments and the auspice of the modern nation state.[268]

The first generation of Arab nationalists in Najaf were comprised of mainly junior religious Shaikhs of Arab and non-Arab descent, prominent *Sadah* figures as well as a few individuals who undertook civil education. Within this group, two contrasting nationalist trends are possible to be tracked later. In spite of the fact that both groups departed from the same ground and laid emphasis on the same principles (superiority of the Arabs, the importance of Arabic language and the call for Arab unity), their views nonetheless had been defined in divergent ways as they subsequently differentiated from each other. The first group was mostly made up of religious Shaikhs who viewed Arab nationalism as a humanist doctrine, emphasizing both language and Islamic components. By contrast, the second group was made up of *effendayya* and some religious Shaikhs, and seemed to have been more willing to accept a more radical and extremist version of Arab nationalism not far from the pan-Arabism of the ruling Sunni elite in Baghdad.

The first group (probably best described as the Islamic wing) articulated its outlook during the events of the Jihad Campaign of 1915 and especially at the eve of the Iraqi Revolution of 1920. Consisting of both Arab and few non-Arab *'ulama*, this group

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[267] See this incident in Al-Joboori, Kamil S (2005) *al-Najaf al-Ashraf wal Thawra al-'Iraqayya al-Kubra 1920*, Beirut.p.592; al-Turihi, M H, *Mudhakarat al-Turihi*, Baghdad, 2006.pp.42-3; al-Asadi, H, ibid. p.42.

[268] Al-Bustani , M, 'Madrasat al-Najaf al-Fiqhaya fi al-'Ahad al-'Othmani', ibid. p.77, p.98.

called for an independent Iraq stretching from Basrah to Mosul and headed by a Hashimi King. Looking to Iraq as their main home, this group primarily emphasized upon the common history of their country.[269] ‘Ali al-Sharqi, a religious *Shaikh*, probably symbolizes the best example of this group. A religious preacher, writer and a poet, al-Sharqi thoroughly expressed his ideas, insisting more on the Arab origin of Iraqis and making frequent references to those historical figures who originated from Iraq rather than other Arab parts. Al-Sharqi mentions, for example, al-Nu’man b. al-Mundhir, al-Muthana b. Haretha al-Shaibani and ‘Asim b. ‘Amru as the real makers of Iraqi history.[270] Contrary to the latter group, which laid more weight upon the Arab ethnic nature of Iraq, considering Iraq as part of one big Arab nation, the first group saw Iraq as a territorial entity belonging to all Iraqis regardless of any different cultures and languages. For this group, Iraq represented with all its different communities, the main concern and priority.[271] At the same time, this group advocated giving the Shi’i people a fair share, asserting the pressing need for reform in the Iraqi political system. Refuting the charges made by some Sunni nationalists, al-Sharqi criticizes those nationalists who coloured their nationalism by sectarian and religious inclination. Al-Sharqi rejects the allegations that hold Shi’i people responsible for the ‘decentralization attitude’ stating, that ‘the people of the Middle Euphrates (the Shi’i majority) are the people who sacrificed their lives for the unity around the Hashemite throne’. Al-Sharqi makes clear his pride in the Euphrates that possesses ‘much more Iraqiness than others who hold only a Turkish culture’.[272]

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[269] Kamal al-Din, M, *Ma’lumat wa Mushahadat fi al-Thauarat al’Iraqiyat al-Kubra li-Sanat 1920*, Baghdad-1971, pp.78-9; Tauber, E, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements*.ibid.p.174.

[270] Al-Sharqi, ‘A, *Maosoa’t al-Shaikh ‘Ali Al-Sharqi al-Nathraya*, pp. 63, 66, 81, 86, 151. Al-Sharqi received his religious learning in Najaf’s *hawza*. Al-Nu’man ibn al-Mundhir, al-Muthana ibn Haretha al-Shaibani and ‘Asim ibn ‘Umroas were among the early chiefs who led Arab armies to fight against the Persians.

[271] See Lukitz, L, *Iraq, The Search for National Identity*, pp.72-80.

[272] Al-Sharqi, ‘A, *Maosoa’t al-Shaikh ‘Ali Al-Sharqi al-Nathraya*, ibid, pp64-6.

It is clearly evident that the formation of the first Iraqi government with overwhelming Sunni domination had been met with disappointment and discontent among this group. Thus, the group had seemingly split into three groups: radical rejecters, those who resorted to isolation and those who called for re-engaging again within the political system. Dubbed as Persians, the rejecters (al-Khalisi, Na'ini and al-Isfahani) were met with a severely governmental order to leave Iraq, the isolation camp (Ja'far Abu al-Timman, Muhammad al-Sadr and many others) took the opposition side and the advocators of engagement (Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi, al-Jaza'eri's two brothers and many others) participated in political life in the hope of affecting change from within.[273]

The second group of Shi'i nationalists, however, had followed another direction. Consisting of mainly young educated people, this group engaged actively within the new Iraqi state, giving scant heed to Shi'i grievances. They worked shoulder to shoulder with their Sunni counterparts as part of the new political system. Concern over the Persian influence in Iraq had been one of the main pillars of their ideology, understandably shared by most if not all Sunni nationalists. Hostility to the Iranians has always been pervasive in the nationalist literature of the Iraqi branch. Even Shi'i religious men like 'Ali al-Sharqi spoke of the threat of Persian immigration. Al-Sharqi warned earlier of the Persian immigrants and their increasing burden on the Iraqi economy as most of them are useless, coming to the city (Najaf) for its good resources and good location and trying to impose their Persian imprint upon its culture and stealing it from its indigenous people.[274] Economic, social and even religious competition within the Najaf milieu coupled with new political circumstances surrounding Iraq, all contributed in re-shaping to a great extent the nationalist outlook and ideas of this group.

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[273] For full account of these developments, see for example, al-Wardi, 'A, *Lamahat Ijtimayyah*, vol, 6, pp.215-317; al-Asadi, H, ibid, pp.190-3.

[274] Al-Mafraji, ibid, p.122. See also, 'Izul-Din,Y, *al-Ishterakayya wal Qawmayya wa Atharuhuma fi al-Adab al-Hadeeth*, Cairo-1968, pp.140-5

Muhammad 'Ali Kamal al-Din depicted those who had attacked the Iranian community in Najaf as committed to 'a very extremist nationalism', admitting that this form of nationalism 'found in Najaf its fertile soil, where the clash between the Iranian community and Arabs has been persistent in the economic, cultural and social aspects, the clash which might be traced back to a century or may be more'.[275] To better understand this incident, therefore, it is imperative here to consider the changing courses of relationship between Iraq and Iran and its impact on breeding Arab nationalist feelings in Najaf.

For a long time, Persians had considered Iraq as part of their home interest. The Safavids and their heirs the Qajars exchanged attacks amid political claims with the Ottomans over Iraq. The Persians, who had converted to Shi'ism in the beginning of the 16th century, came to claim the right of defending the Iraqi Shi'is against Ottoman oppression.[276] Owing to the fact that most Shi'a shrines are located in Iraq, the Persians therefore, insisted upon their right to protect the Shi'is of Iraq. No doubt, the Persian mass migration to Iraq (into the Holy Cities in particular) has given the Persian governments another cause to assert their claim. Treaties signed between the two states had very little success in solving the main problems. The Pahlavi government, for example, annexed *al-Muhammarah* (Khuzistan) in 1925, which enjoyed a degree of autonomy and was governed by an Arab Shaikh. Additionally, the Pahlavi government was still reluctant to recognize Iraq as a new state even after 1920. Even inside Iraq, some Persians went further to contend that Iraq belonged to Iran, and hence subordinate

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[275] Kamal Al-Din, M 'A, al-*Najaf fi Rouba' Qarn Mundh 1908*, Beirut-2005, p.105.

[276] Cetinsaya, G, the Caliph and Mujtahids: Ottoman Policy towards the Shiite Community Iraq in the Late Nineteenth Century, *MES*, vol.41, No.4, pp.561-74; al-Ansari, S, *Al-'Alaqat al-Iraqayya al-Iranayya khilal Khamsat Quroon*, Dar al-Huda-Beirut, first edition-1987.pp.19-36, pp.63-93; al-Wardi, *Lamahat*.vol.1.

to the Iranian government.[277] Taking this into account, it was not surprising that nationalists in Najaf attacked what they considered as ‘Persian arrogance’.

One of the perpetrators of the aforementioned attack was Yousif Rujaib, a Najafi nationalist and one of its few active journalists during the 1920 Iraqi Revolution. In his writings, Rujaib repeatedly states his fierce criticisms of the Iranians, blaming them for many difficulties that afflicted the city. Writing in his al-Najaf newspaper in 1926, Rujaib attacked ‘the Persian elements in the city, calling for them to be driven out of the city to preserve the genuine Arab identity of Najaf because the Persians were a strong impediment to the intellectual movement in the city’.[278] Rujaib also raises suspicions over the ‘Oudha money’ received and monopolised by some ‘*ulama* in Najaf, and advised the *‘ulama* to offer the needy people their due share rather than give it to the well-off’.[279] Rujaib later moved his activities to Baghdad, where he fully devoted himself to defending Arab nationalism as his main cause. He worked in Baghdad as the editor-in-chief of *Nahdha* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the *Nahdha* (Renaissance) Party, in the late 1920s. Headed by Amin al-Charchifchi and mainly comprised of Shi’i youth, the *Nahdha* Party attempted to combine both the Shi’i grievances towards the Iraqi state alongside Arab nationalist sentiments.[280] Rujaib, as a result of his personal experiences in Najaf under the Ottoman and British occupations, expressed his radical and anti-colonial tendency outright. Anderson has accurately remarked that ‘the paradox of imperial official nationalism was that it inevitably brought what was increasingly thought of and written about as European ‘national histories’ into the consciousnesses of the colonized- not merely via occasional obtuse festivities, but also through reading-

[277] Further details about the developments of relationships between Iraq and Iran, see Edmonds.C.J, The Iraqi-Persian Frontier; 1639-1939, *AA*, vol, 62,1975, pp147-154; Abdulghani, J M, *Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis*, London,1984, pp1-15; al-Hassani, A A, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqayya*, vol, 2.pp.191-205; Nakash,Y, ibid, p.107

[278] Al-Mafraji, A.H, *Harakat al-Tayar al-Islahi al-Najafi 1908-1933*, 2002, p.77.

[279] Ibid, p.112. See about ‘Oudha money or bequest, chapter 1 and 2.

[280] Al-‘Ijli.M, *Yousif Rujaib, Faqeed al-Adab wal al-Arab*, Najaf, 1947, pp.21-6; Aliwi, H.H, *al-Ahzab al-Syasiyya fi al-Iraq Secret and Public*.

rooms and classrooms.'[281] Expressing his pan-Arabism, Rujaib vehemently condemned any form of regional or sectarian cries or *Shu'ubi* tendency, placing the blame on these immoral calls for the Arab's failure. He criticised Arab intellectuals who abandoned their mother language for foreign languages or old Phoenician and Egyptian dialects. Rujaib highly admired the famous Arab poet al-Mutanabi not only for his innovative genius but also mainly for his pure Arab spirit. Al-Mutanabi who blamed the Arabs for their powerlessness and weakness, called upon them to stand up in the face of their enemies.[282] When Rujaib died in July 1947, the new generation of Shi'i and Sunni nationalists expressed real loss for a great believer in pan-Arabism.[283]

Rujaib's ideas were also shared and loudly reiterated by Muhammad Rida al-Hassani, another Najafi adherent of Arab nationalism. Al-Hassani, who issued al-Qadisayya Magazine in Najaf in 1938, considers Arab nationalism as the highest expression of Islam. According to him, Arabism and Islam developed into one entity after the appearance of Islam. Al-Hassani contends that language and state are the main pillars of a nation's life. Nationalist feelings, however, are bolestered by both the unity of religion and original stock. Thus, if unity of language and state were complemented by the unity of origin of stock and beliefs, then this nation would be one of the most gifted states in the world.[284] Al-Hassani recalls the dream of one Arab nation during the time of al-Nu'man .b. al-Mundhir, the Arab King of al-Hira pointing out how this dream was revived and brought into effect by virtue of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. To awaken Arab people to makea new destiny, al-Hassani resorts to a kind of Fichte

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[281] Debray, R, 'Marxism and the National Question', cited in Anderson, B, *Imagined Communities*, London, 1991, p.118.

[282] Al-'Ijli, M, *Yousif Rujaib*, *Faqeed al-Adab wal al-Arab*, ibid.pp.48-68. See below about *Sha'ubayya*.

[283] See for example, the special edition devoted to Rujaib by *Majalat al-Garai al-Najafayya*. No.22/23-July 1947.

[284] Al-Hassani, M R, *al-Haqiqa wal-Arab wal-Islam*, Najaf-1942, pp.60-1. *Al-Qadisayya* refers to the famous battle between the Arab Muslims and the Persian army in 17/637, which opened Iraq for the Arab Muslims. See chapter one for more details about al-Hira.

famous address, calling upon the Arabs to restore their glorious revered history in the new twentieth century.[285] Al-Hassani stresses the importance of nurturing the new generation with the Arab customs quoting the Prophet's Hadith: I love Arabs for three; as I am an Arab, the Arabic Quran and because the tongue of the people of paradise is Arabic.[286]

'Abdul al-Razaq al-Asadi goes even further to affirm that he addresses only the true Arab people who really belong to the Prophet Muhammad by blood and language. Al-Asadi dedicated his book to 'Faisal II and to the young people who shall be the leaders of the nationalist strife and other *Mujahidin* (fighters) in the hope of uniting the Arabs under one banner, constitution and throne'. Like al-Hassani, al-Asadi recalls the memories of the Arab fighters in the battles of *Dhi Qar* and *Al-Qadisayya* (against the Persians) and *Al-Yarmook* (against the Byzantines) to arouse Arab people. It is telling that al-Asadi rarely mentions Islam, preferring to resort to his Arab bond that links him with other Arab people.[287]

Arab nationalists: from the *Istiqlal* to the Ba'th

The first and probably the most organized party in Iraq until 1950 had been the *Istiqlal* Party. The *Istiqlal* Party (Independence) was founded in 1946 on the line of *Nadi al-Muthana* (al-Muthana Club). Muhammad Mahdi Kuba (a wealthy Shi'i figure from Baghdad), who was the second person in the rank of al-Muthana Club, was now chosen to lead the new Party thanks to his reputation as a pan-Arabist and his support for al-Kilani's aborted nationalist coup of 1941. Modeled on the German ideals, al-Muthana Club adopted the *fatawat* (Youth) system and made it compulsory for Iraqi schools. Al-Muthana Club, however, closed down immediately after the failure of al-Kilani's

[285] Ibid, pp.66.7.
[286] Ibid, pp.92-3. Notice that al-Asadi makes the same usage of al-Hasani historical symbols and references in particular the ones that recall into mind the Arab victories over the Persians.
[287] Al-Asadi, A A, *Al-Wahy al-Qawmi*, Najaf-1949.pp.8-20.

aforementioned coup.[288]

This background strongly influenced the ideology of the *Istiqlal* Party. The Party defended the view of full liberation of Iraq and rejected any foreign intervention. The Party also argued for the full liberation of Arab countries so as to accomplish Arab unity. Denouncing the present social and political order, the Party disallowed the membership of tribal *Shaikhs* including even those with dignified backgrounds who participated in the 1920 Iraqi Revolution. Although this negative attitude towards tribal *Shaikhs* was justified on the grounds that political consciousness was not yet ripe in such backward areas, it was clear that the Party was at stark odds with the old regime including the association with some of its people.[289]

Fadil Ma'alah, a Najafi lawyer and one of its founding members, set up the Najaf branch and pursued the task of disseminating its principles, ideology and platform. Ma'alah, however, left the Party after a short period as more enthusiastic and radical generation took his place. Two figures of this new generation worked tirelessly to expand its membership: Ahmad al-Haboobi, a lawyer and a son of an influential and renowned family, and Ahmad al-Jaza'eri, a junior religious *Shaikh* and a son of 'Abdul Karim al-Jaza'eri, a well- known Najafi *mujtahid*. Al-Haboobi rested undoubtedly upon a distinguished and dignified familial history as his grandfather Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi was the leader of the Jihad Campaign of 1914/15 against the British. The same is true with regard to Ahmad al-Jaza'eri as his father was a close assistant to Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi and a pro-nationalist figure. Owing to their social and religious status and mainly because of the new set of ideas that were popularized by nationalists, the *Istiqlal* Party gained enormous success in Iraq and Najaf in

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[288] For detailed study about the German influence upon al-*Muthana* Club, see for example, Wein, P, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism, Authoritarian, totalitarian and pro-Fascist inclinations 1932-1941*, London & New York, 2006, pp.7-42; idem. Who is 'liberal' in 1930s Iraq? Education as a contested terrain in a nascent public sphere, in Schumann, C, (editor), ibid, pp.31-47. See also Shikara, Ahmad, ibid, pp.120-1; 'Aliwi, H, H, ibid, pp.88-9.

[289] See for more details, Khaleel, 'A, *Ahzab al-Mua'aradha al-'Alanayya fi al-Iraq 1946-1954*, Baghdad-1984.pp.81-6.

particular.[290]

The main idea that was the subject of transformation related to the form of relationships between nationalism, Islam and Arabism. In Iraq, as observed earlier, the nationalist ideology was mainly shaped during the previous two decades under the influence of the secular ideas of Sati'a al-Husri. Al-Husri, in fact, relegated an insignificant role to religion and his nationalist ideology remained secular with no room for Islam. Al-Husri, thus had given more weight to language and history at the expense of religion. The new formula, by contrast, had made a close and special link between Islam and Arabism after a long period of pure secular Arabism. This theoretical shift accordingly affected the nationalist's movements and parties formed during this period including (al-Muthana Club and its heir *Istiqlal* Party).

The new shift that took place within the Arab nationalist thought realized between the late of 1930s and the beginning of 1940s. This shift was first brought about by Qustantine Zurayq, a Syrian Christian who graduated from Columbia, Chicago and Princeton Universities, and introduced in his first book *al-Way al-Qawmi* (National Consciousness) that was published in 1939. Zurayq assigns Arab people with the task of forming their nation in order to achieve their mission. More important, Zurayq stresses the role played by 'the Prophet Muhammad as the messenger of Islam and the builder of a solid state...thus, Islam as an Arab heritage is the foundation of Arab culture both in the medieval and modern periods'.[291] The new transformation was very significant, as it had made Islam eqivalent to Arab identity. At the same time, as Arab nationalist ideology was infused with a religious tone, in turn, it lessened the secular flavour in its literature, and appeared more appealing and convincing.

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[290] I debt a detailed account of Shaikh Ahmad al-Jaza'eri's life and activities to Shukar, K.M, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf, Rijal wa Afkar wa Mawaqif*, (Unpublished book), vol, 2.pp.58-108. See also, al-Fayadh, M, *Tarikh al-Najaf al-Siyasi. 1941-1958*, MA Diss, University of Kufa-2000, pp.35-7. See also the account of his close friend al-Haboobi, A, *Ashkhas kama 'Araftahum*, Dar al-Hikma-London-2002, 1st published, pp.45-54. See also about al-Jaza'eri in particular, Batatu, H, ibid.p.753.

[291] Cited in Choueiri,Y M, ibid.pp.130-1

This idea was further developed by Abdullah al-‘Alayili in his book *Dustur al-Arab al-Qaumi* (*The National Constitution of Arabs)* that was published in 1941. The importance of this book lies in the fact that its author had been renowned for his deep Islamic conviction and a positive attitude towards Shi’i symbols in particular. No doubt, this guaranteed his ideas a good reception and popularity among the Shi’i people in Lebanon and Iraq alike.[292] Like most Arab nationalists, al-‘Alayili considered language as ‘an essential pillar on which a stable national edifice is erected’.[293] Although al-‘Alayili, acknowledged the central role of Islam, he refrained himself of sectarian or communal understanding, bringing Arab nationalism close to the Iraqi Shi’is, who had always been proud of their Arab origin.

The new phase of Arab nationalism was welcomed and received positively by Lebanese Shi’i intellectuals and activists who, in turn, participated through their religious and social links in Najaf in advancing this idea. Lebanese families like the Shararah family and magazines like *al-‘Irfan*, clearly advocated Arab nationalism stressing on Shi’i Islam and an Arab identity.[294] For the Shi’a faithful, Arabism had at this point appeared at the heart of their beliefs. Further, some champions of Arab nationalism made the claim that Imam ‘Ali was the pioneer of Arab nationalism, who based its principles on equality, liberty and in line with authentic Arabic traditions.[295] In the light of this transformation, Arabism distinguished as a genuine expression of Shi’ism more than any other ideology or creed. This perfectly explains the new positive attitude of Shi’i peoples towards the Arab nationalist movement in the late of 1940s in

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[292] Al-‘Alayili (Lebanese Sunni cleric) authored two books about Imam Hussain: *Imam Hussain* and *The History of Hussain*.
[293] Haim, S, *Arab Nationalism, an Anthology*, 1962, University of California Press, p.40.
[294] About the role of the Lebanese intellectuals in Najaf, see for example: Shahadah, M, ‘al-‘Alaqa al-Fikrayya bayn al-Najaf wa Jabal ‘Amil’, (10-18) in ‘(group of editors), *al-Najaf al-Ashraf.Ishamat fi al-Hadhara al-Islamayya*, London, 1999, vol, 2; Khalidi, T, Shaykh Ahmad ‘Arif Al-Zayn and Al-‘Irfan. (110-124), in, Buheiry, *Intellectual Life in the Arab East 1890-1939*. M, R (editor) Beirut-1981.
[295] Jourdaq, G, *al-Imam ‘Ali, Sout al-‘Adalah al-Insanayya*, (5 vols), vol, 5, *‘Ali wal Qawmayya al-Arabayya*, 2003, pp, 78-9.

comparison with their lukewarm stance during 1930s.

The Ba'th in Iraq

These ideas gained grounds within Iraqi soil in an organized form with the emergence of the Ba'th Party. Zaki al-Arsuzi had probably been the first ideologue who took Zurayq's ideas further. Al-Arsuzi, who worked in Iraq between 1939 and 1940, was a pioneer of the Ba'th concept in 1940. In fact, al-Arsuzi was the founder of the Ba'th Party in the winter of 1940. Its principle ideology was based on the idea that the Arabs constitute one nation and the homeland of Arab is one undivided territory.[296]

Combining these ideas, Michel 'Aflaq developed the concept of an eternal Arab message as well as the name of the Ba'th.[297] Though 'Aflaq's concepts were not entirely new or original, he succeeded in formulating them under a new ideological grouping; that is the Ba'th Party, which was officially established in 1947. The Ba'th was founded first in Syria before finding its way to the Arab students studying at Lebanese universities and seminaries. Another branch was established in Amman (Jordan). The Iraqi students in Beirut were the first group to import the Ba'th ideology into Iraq.

The Ba'th built its first networks in Baghdad appealing to university students and in Nassirayya (the south) the Ba'th's influence depended on the personal skills and kinship networks of Fouad al-Rikabi, who was designated as the first secretary of the Ba'th in Iraq in 1950. Surprisingly enough, the first party branch that was set up in Iraq was in Karbala in 1948 thanks to Sa'dun Hamadi, a Shi'i from Karbala itself. Hamadi, who had recently graduated from the American University of Beirut, also founded in the early 1950s another branch in Najaf, attracting ex-members of the *Istiqlal* Party.[298] The new

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[296] Hana, A, *al-Tayarat al-Fikrayya fi Surayya wa Lobnan bayna 1920 wa 1945*, Damascus, 1973, pp.49-53; Khadduri, M, *Political and Intellectual Trends*, ibid, pp.206-7; Batatu, H, *Old Social Classes*, ibid, pp.722-4.

[297] Hana, ibid.p.55; Khadduri, M, ibid, pp.194-8.

[298] Rejwan, N, Arab Nationalism, In Search for an Ideology, pp.145-65, in '*The Middle East in Transition*' (editor) Laqueur, W.London-1958; Haj, S, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963. Capital,*

party mainly approached educated people in Najaf like teachers, though a good number came from the Al al-Shaikh Radhi family. The appeal of the Ba'th party to Arab families, including this family in particular, was on account of the deep-rooted antagonism between Arab families and the Persian '*ulama* resided in the city.[299] Social and familial networks seemed to have played significant role in attracting new members to the party primarily from within the Arab families. Not surprising, the party, by contrast to the ICP, did not appeal to other non-Arab communities, who were excluded by its very concepts and ideology. After a brief period of suspicion between the new group and the *Istiqlal* Party, they agreed to work together. Many members of the *Istiqlal* Party joined the Ba'th due to the radical tone of the new Party. In addition, the new Party had followed similar tactics that were used by Communists, such as clandestine networks and radical means to confront the regime. It also borrowed and adapted Marxist concepts such as socialism and scientific claims. The Ba'th, for example, insisted on Arab socialism as opposed to Marxist socialism.[300]

It is worth stressing that external factors have had a profound impact upon Iraqi politics even more than internal developments. Two factors, in particular, contributed to the revival of pan-Arabism between late 1940s and mid-1960s. The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the emerging of Naser in Egypt after 1952 both helped to sustain the nationalist movement in Iraq. These two separated events have not only given Arabism a breath of life but also ended the old Iraqi regime's life.

The Palestine question should be undoubtedly accounted as one of the main catalysts that empowered the nationalist movement not only in Iraq, but across the Arab East. While internal issues of each Arab country framed the main concerns of all nationalist parties during 1930s, the focus dramatically shifted to the Palestine crisis after 1948.

Power and Ideology, New York-1997, pp.91-2; Fayadh, M, ibid.pp.73-5; 'Aliwi, H, H, ibid, pp.148-160; Shukar, K.M, ibid, p.73.

[299] About Sayyed Kadhim al-Yazdi, see chapter 2.

[300] Choueiri, Y, M, ibid, pp.157-8. See also, Khadduri, M, ibid.pp.153-8.

This affected not only nationalist parties but also the whole system in the Arab East. In Iraq, however, attention had been devoted to the Palestinian crisis since 1935. The Iraqi government, political parties and ordinary people had showed great sympathy towards the Palestinians. During the Palestinian Revolution of 1936-39, for instance, Arab nationalists in Iraq set up *Jama'ayyat al-Difa' 'An Falestine* (The Palestine Defense Committee) with branches in the main Iraqi cities. This committee undertook the task of organising political activities, collecting money and cooperating with Palestinian activists. The Palestine question, more than any other issue, had greatly appealed to Iraqis, serving the nationalist trend, and as we shall later see, contributed in bringing enormous pressure on Najaf's '*ulama* to take the nationalist side at the expense of Communists. Palestinian teachers and activists in Iraq played a great 'role in the pan-Arab ideology and in forming the imminent link between it and the Palestine question. A small minority with a high level of consciousness and sense of purpose capable of forming or reviving an ideological faction or political movement, will often imbue it with its own unique character to a degree far in excess of its relative size'.[301]

In the aftermath of Palestine's division in 1947, and the war of 1948, a group of military officers toppled the monarchy in Egypt in July 1952. Most importantly, Jamal 'Abdul al-Naser emerged after 1956 as a hero, providing Arab nationalism with its charismatic figure. Naser, who preoccupied himself mainly with Egyptian affairs during the first years, espoused Arabism as his new creed and Egypt soon replaced Baghdad as the new Mecca of pan-Arab movement. This became clear after 1956 when Egypt came under the Tripartite Attack of Israel, France and Britain. Thus, Egypt appeared not only as a home of Arab nationalism but also a main hub of Arab nationalist groups opposing their old regimes in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen as well as a departure point of anti –

[301] Eppel, M, *The Palestine Conflict in the History of Modern Iraq, the Dynamics of Involvement 1928-48*.p.27; Choueiri, Y, M, ibid.p.128; Dawisha, A, ibid.p.109; Shikara, A, R.ibid.pp.122.

imperialist and resistant groups of Palestine and Algeria.[302]

The Egyptian propaganda machine especially *Radio Sout Al-Arab* (Voice of the Arab) was widely received in most Arab countries with passion by captivated Arab people. This Radio not only popularized Nasirism, hence Arab nationalism but also 'transformed Egypt's broadcasting system into a potent propaganda weapon, whose considerable success, especially in the 1950s, played a major role in projecting and later cementing Egypt's and Naser's leadership of the Arab nationalist movement'.[303] Consequently, Egypt rather than Iraq had become the Prussia of the Arab world, leaving the monarchy in Baghdad counting its days.[304]

Nationalists in Iraq, however, had to face another challenge for a while; that was the strong Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). Encounters between nationalist and Communist trends were to decide the future of Iraq, and Najaf in particular played a profound role in these encounters, albeit at a later stage.

Secular Communism in Islamic society

Marxism had been one of most popular and provocative ideologies in the world. Communist parties appealed to a large section of people across the world and this was partially due to the victory of the Russian Revolution of 1917, its defiant posture during and post World War II, and its success in rapidly reconstructing the Soviet Union. This telling triumph had become an attractive model, mainly for the radical intelligentsia in third world countries, as a means to accelerate political independence, economic development and industrialization.[305]

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[302] Al-Dib, F, *'Abdul al-Naser wa Tahreer al-Mashraq al-'Arabi*, Cairo, 2000; Dawisha, A, *Iraq, A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, Princeton University Press-New Jersy-2009, pp.165-9.

[303] Dawisha, A, *Arab Nationalism*, ibid.p.148

[304] For more details about how Naser's ascendance affected Iraq's political role, see Marlow, J, *Arab Nationalism and British Imperialism, A Study in Power Politics*, London.1961.pp.178-9.

[305] See for example, Brown, A, *The Rise & Fall of Communism*, Vintage Books-London, 2010.pp.117-34; Emerson, R, *From Empire to Nation, the Rise to self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, 1970, pp.372-3; Kautsky, J, H, *Communism and the Politics of Development, Persistent Myths and Changing Behavior*, New York, 1968, pp.172-183.

Iraq witnessed two insuperable phenomena between mid 1920s and 1950s; unprecedented decline in the role of religion among Iraqi people, notably the Shi'a community and an obvious increase in secular ideologies. It is true that the same phenomenon had also been detected in the same period in many parts of the world but the Iraqi Shi'a community undoubtedly represents a unique case study. Secularization had certainly been associated in Western European societies with the advancing of the Industrial Revolution, rapid progress in sciences and spreading of modern technologies. An associated result was a decline in the number of church attendants with much less attention given to religious obligations. Secular ideologies and anti-religious movements had flourished in such environments as an attractive substitute for lay intellectuals and even some religious dissenters. Although there is no inescapable link between secularism and advanced industrialization, findings indicate some form of relationship. At the same time, it is argued, that 'secularizing political forces have been at work in countries that still lagged behind in terms of capitalistic industrial development, as in France in the late eighteenth century and in many of the underdeveloped countries today'.[306]

Iraq, however, during the period under study, had undergone no industrialization and achieved no marked progress in terms of development and technological advancement. Two questions may arise here: firstly, how did such a secular ideology adapt itself for a very traditional Muslim community? Secondly, what explains the uncommon decline of the Shi'a religion and the weakness of the *'ulama*?

Until the beginning of 1950s, Islam was deemed as 'incompatible with atheist and materialist Communism'. Under what has been known 'the Bulwark of Islam theory',

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[306] Berger, P, 'Social Sources of Secularization', pp.230-248 in Alexander, J, C & Seidman, S (editors), *Culture and Society*, *Contemporary Debates*, New York-1990. It is interesting to know that British official and diplomats in Iraq during this period showed their doubts for a successful Marxist party in Iraq as they believed that Iraqi people have no appetite for such complex ideas and that such secular ideology cannot flourish in a backward and traditional society like Iraq. See Franzen, J, Education and the radicalization of Iraqi politics: Britain, the Iraqi Communists Party, and the 'Russian link', 1941-49, *IJCIS*, vol, 2, No.1, pp.99-113.

Communism, it was maintained, had no chance to succeed in the Islamic world as the majority of Muslim people would still abide by their religion.[307]_After Communsim's salient success in the Islamic world, an opposite argument was introduced, according to which, a good affinity was perceived between Islam and Communism as:

'both of which are all-embracing in their concepts...Hence, the temptation for Muslim radicals to turn to another ideology justifying secular totalitarianism'.[308]

Communism and religion: Shi'ism in the context

Although most ethnic groups in Iraq had welcomed Communism, its success amongst the Shi'a community had been exceptional. Clearly, Communism had been more successful within Shi'a regions in comparison with the Sunni areas in Iraq. Whereas Najaf, the strong hold of Shi'ism contained the second largest number of Communist followers after Baghdad between 1952 and 1953, there was not a single Communist in Faluja (Sunni area). Badr Shakir al-Sayab, well known Iraqi poets who worked in the areas of Ramadi and Faluja in 1948-1949, noticed that he did not come across any local person who knew anything about Communism or Marxism.[309]

Indeed, Shi'a and Sunni communities in Iraq had largely viewed, Communism in divergent ways. For a majority of Sunnis in Iraq, Communism was perceived as an alien ideology that was at odds with Islam. Arab nationalism, by contrast, was hailed and welcomed as Islam was considered a principal component of this nationalist ideology. The case was different for the Shi'a community as many Shi'is saw a new hope for salvation in Communism owing to being disillusioned with the prospects of any real political change. This is not to say, however, that these divergent perceptions regarding Communism were solely confined to Shi'a and Sunni communities simply because of their contrasting conventions, rather they were also due to other interrelated political,

[307] Laqueur, W, Z, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, London-1956.p.5.
[308] Laqueur, W, Z, ibid.p.5.
[309] Al-Sayab, B, *Kunt Shau'yyan*, Al-Jamal Publishing, Baghdad, 2007, p.110

economic and social factors.

In 1953, Sir J. Troutbeck reported that:

'The unrest caused by the social condition in Iraq is aggravated very much more by the unhappy relations, which exist between the Sunnis and the Shias; it is no coincidence that 90 per cent of the Communists in Iraq are Shias.[310]

Batatu has observed that:

'Of the sixteen leading Communists of this period, five... belonged to the Christian minority and four others to the numerically dominant but politically underprivileged Shi'i sect. This carries the implication that the exclusion by the existing order-not necessarily of the individuals themselves but of their religious group in general-from certain roles or benefits may have been a factor in their proneness to Communism'.[311]

In fact, Communism was viewed differently by Catholics and Protestant Christians. Crossman has noticed that Communism had been more appealing to Catholic faithful than to Protestants. This is accounted by the hardening of the religious feelings among Catholics compared with the Protestants. Crossman argues also that 'the Protestant is, at least in origin, a conscientious objector against spiritual subjection to any hierarchy'.[312] Almond claims that members of the Communist parties in Catholic countries such as Italy were more hostile to the Catholic Church. This attitude is less observed 'among the French… hardly appears at all among the Americans and British.[313]

Communism had managed to achieve this remarkable success among the Iraqi Shi'is mainly due to two reasons; firstly, Communists had been successful in presenting themselves as a non-compromising group with an anti-colonial ideology, hence providing an organized space for unrepresented people who felt stripped of their

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[310] EQ 1016/32, No.108, Confidential, June 29 1953, to W.Churchill.

[311] Batatu, H, *Old Social Classes*, ibid.p.422. Batatu, however, has been criticized for not providing thorough explanation for this phenomenon. See Daniel, N, Contemporary Perceptions of the Revolution in Iraq on 14 July 1958, (pp.1-29) in (editors) Robert, A, F & Louis, W, R *the Iraqi Revolution of 1958. The Old Social Classes* Revisited, London.1991.

[312] Crossman, R (editor), *The God that Failed*, New York-1952, pp.6-7.

[313] Ibid. p.131

political, social and economic rights.[314] Secondly and most importantly, Shi'a Communists in Iraq had often reconciled Communist ideas with their Shi'a creed, the fact that made Communism more tangible and down-to-earth. By using Shi'a symbols, references and characters, Shi'a Communists established better bases in the Shi'a regions than any other rival groups.

In fact, Communism in both Iraq and Iran had spread, benefiting mostly from prevalent political grievances. Later on both the ICP and the Iranian Tudeh Party exploited local traditions and Shi'a religious symbols to attract people's sympathy.[315] The Bolsheviks established good networks in Iran immediately after the victory of the October Revolution in 1917, and the Communist groups benefited from the fresh revolutionary memories of the Constitutional Revolution and wide dissatisfaction of local people owing to the existence of foreign forces on the Persian soil during the World War I.[316]

Meanwhile Bolshevik propaganda seems to have reached Najaf and Karbala. It was reported that during Najaf's uprising of 1918, there had been a man who used to carry a red flag every day, shouting proudly: long live Bolshevism, long live Bolsheviks. Moreover, Muhammad 'Abdul Hussain, an active Najafi journalist who returned home in 1918 after a visit to Iran, conveyed socialist ideas. These ideas were to find their ways to his *Al-Furat* Newspaper, a daily supplement of the 1920 Iraqi Revolution. In *al-Furat*'s first issue, 'Abdul Hussain provided a definition for Bolshevism, explaining how this call would achieve its success only within a suitable soil, where frustrated people suffer because of their moral and economic conditions. 'Abdul Hussain also later wrote about the meaning of the principle of equality in Communism and how this

[314] Al-Homani, M, A, *al-'Aroubat, Man Yasma'a*, ibid, p.25.
[315] After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Tudeh Secretary, Nourredin Kianouri wrote that 'Shi'a…has traditional ties with the popular and revolutionary movement. the patriotic Shiite clergy have repeatedly taken part in fighting foreign invaders, and had an active role to play, for instance, in the 1906-1911 revolution'. See (editor) Daniels, R, *A Documentary History of Communism and the World, From Revolution to Collapse* (University of Vermont-1994), p.286. See also the recent study, Dabashi, H, *Shi'is, A Religious of Protest*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press-Cambridge, Massachusetts-London-2011, pp.73-100.
[316] Zabih, S, *the Communist Movement in Iran*, Berkley and Los Angles-1966.pp.1-26.

concept had developed by Socialist thinkers like Owen and Thomson in England and Saint-Simon and Fourier in France. 'Abdul Razaq 'Adwah, a Najafi lawyer paid tribute to Karl Marx as 'one of greatest men, who devoted his life for the victory of Socialism, who sacrificed everything until he established scientific Socialism'.[317]

The same period also witnessed a fierce confrontation between Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq and the British, who often linked some of these '*ulama* with Bolshevism. Some of the first British references that linked Shi'i '*ulama* in Iran and Iraq with Bolsheviks may be explained in light of slogans and symbols that were employed by rebels against the British.[318] The Bolsheviks seemingly offered a hand to Iraqi rebels, promising to provide some material support yet the '*ulama* rejected these offers.[319]

The Bolsheviks expanded their influence to Iraq when they set up the first Communist cell in Basrah. Thanks to a joint action of Comintern representatives and some Iranian Communists, the Bolsheviks organized the first ever-Communist cell in Iraq with 'Abdul Hamid al-Khatib as the first representative in Iraq. Al-Khatib, (a Persian in origin) who had graduated from the American University of Beirut and came back to Iraq in 1925 formed other Communist cells in Nassirayya, Samawah and Diwaniyya.[320]

Evidently, Communist writings were circulated in both Arabic and Persian in Najaf and Karbala. For example, Communist literature found its way to Iraq through some Persian residents in the holy cities. Several Communist newspapers, which were confiscated in Karbala from some Iranian residents in the late of 1920s, were originally published in Iran. The Iranian *Tudeh* Party was a major channel for the transfer of Communist ideas

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[317] Fiyadh, 'A H, *Joudhoor al-Fikr al-Ishtraki wal Taqadoumi fi al-Iraq 1920-1934*, Beirut-1980, pp.116-7,121,135-6.

[318] Sir P. Cox (Tehran) to Earl Curzon.No.268 Telegraphic; No.427.Sir P.Cox (Tehran) to Earl Curzon.No.269, Telegraphic FO, No.426; Batatu, p.390; al-Mudhafar, K, *Thawrat al-Iraq al-Taharurayya 'am 1920*, Najaf-1972, pp.106-111.

[319] See about this point, the important and late statement of Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi (1886-1967), one of the leading Shi'i personalities during the Revolution, in Ismail, T, Y, *The Communist Movement in the Arab World*, London, 2005, p.12.

[320] Al-Khirsan, S, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadeeth, al-Harakat al-Markisiyya 1920-1990*, pp.17-18; Batatu, H, ibid, pp.405-6.

into Iraq during 1940s and 1950s, and both the British and the Americans expressed their concerns over the activities of *Tudeh's* members who used to visit the Holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.[321]

In Najaf, too Communist publications and writings reached the hands of the Persian-speaking community. Al-Jawahiri relates that he was familiar with the Marxist literature in Najaf during 1918 even before Baghdadi activists like Hussain Jamil, Hussain al-Rahal and many others who-would become Marxists at a later stage.[322]

Good example of the Persian influence was Mahdi Hashim, who is regarded by Batatu as a founder of the Iraqi Communist Party. Hashim was born in Najaf in 1908 and came from a lower middle class family. Hashim, a son of a Persian peasant father who turned *mumin*, perhaps was influenced by reading the Persian Communist papers. Hashim had strengthened his Communist ideas and experiences as he joined the Iranian Communist movement in 1929 working with the Committee (*Tudeh*) Party in 1949.[323]

Another example of the Persian influence is Hasan Abbas al-Karbas (also Persian in origin). Al-Karbas, who was born in Najaf in 1910, had studied at law School in Baghdad and became a lawyer. He belonged to a lower middle class family; son of an itinerant petty trader and auctioneer. He joined the Communist movement in 1931 and then joined the National Democratic Party in 1940, advocating an alliance between Communists and the National Democratic Party after 1958.[324]

Communist groups seem to have been much more active in the south compared with other Iraqi cities excluding Baghdad. Communist ideas were popular in the south (including the Holy Cities of Najaf, Karbala and Kadhamayya) in the beginning of 1920s due to two reasons; widespread feelings of frustrations, exclusion and oppression

[321] Confidential security information, BD 28, Department of the Air Force, Baghdad-Iraq, 21 March 1953; secret security information BD 30, Baghdad-Iraq, 28 March 1953.
[322] Sha'ban, 'A H, *al-Jawahiri, Jadal al-Sha'er wal Hayat*, Beirut,1997, p.177
[323] Fiyadh, 'A H, *Joudhoor al-Fikr al-Ishtraki wal Taqadoumi fi al-Ira 1920-1934*, p.125, note (113); Batatu, H, ibid.p.419.
[324] Batatu, ibid, pp. 419, 422, 23.

among the Shi'a community and availability and exposure to Communist literature.[325] Feelings of frustration and disappointment that prevailed may have contributed in pushing young Shi'is towards the Communist movement and away from an elitist regime that was relying on the support of a small group of wealthy *Shaikhs* and loyal landowners. Deprived of his Iraqi nationality in 1927 by the Iraqi government, Mahdi Hashim penned in his exile in Tehran an article in the Persian paper *Mardam*, indicating that 'in the whole Iraqi diplomatic corps there are only two Shi'is …and of the eighty staff officers of the Iraqi army only three come from Shi'i families, while 90 percent of the soldiers are sons of the Shi'a community'. Also important, according to Batatu, the experience of the famous siege of Najaf that Hashim lived through in 1920. Hashim states that 'in later days hatred for the foreign occupation came to mean to him the same thing as communism'.[326]

Marxist literature also found its way to Najaf through the Fertile Crescent countries and Egypt as early as 1920s. It was in Egypt that the first Marxist books and pamphlets were edited, translated, and subsequently received by the young generation in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. Farah Antoun, Shabli Shmail, Nikola Hadad and Salama Musa were among many who publicized Communism among Arab audiences and influenced their recipients in Arab countries.[327] In 1922, the first Arabic translation of Lenin's *State and Revolution*, which was titled *The Memories of Lenin* in Arabic, appeared in Egypt. However, a turning point in the history of Marxism in Arab countries had been the translation of *The Communist Manifesto* into Arabic in 1933. Khalid Bakdash, the founder and first Secretary of the Syrian Communist Party, accomplished the first translation.[328]

As Communism was outlawed by the Iraqi government under the pressure of British,

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[325] Al-Homani, M 'A, *al-'Aroubat, Man Yasma'a*, ibid, p.25.
[326] Batatu, H, ibid.pp.422-23.
[327] Hana, 'A, *al-Atijahat al-Fikrayya fi Surayya wa Lebanon 1920-145*, ibid, p128-131; Fiyadh, 'A H, ibid, p.98.
[328] Hana, 'A, *al-Atijahat al-Fikrayya*, ibid, pp.135-137.

most Communist activists and their associated groups found refuge under Abu al-Timman's Iraqi National party, which was set up in 1922.Yousif Salman Yousif (Fahd), who would later become the first secretary of the ICP, began his political career as a member of the Iraqi National party. Later, Fahd and many of his Communists fellows released from prison through Abu al-Timman. Abu al-Timman, who became the main target of criticism and dubbed Communist for his defence of Communists, deserted his political career for good soon after 1936 until his death in November 1945.[329]

It was in 1934 that the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was founded after few sporadic attempts. Thanks to the leadership skills of Yousif Salman Yousif (Fahd), a Christian from the south (Nassirayya), the ICP soon extended its cells to cover most Iraqi cities and towns. Hailed by all Iraqi communities, the ICP received a good welcome chiefly by small ethnic groups (Jews, Christians, etc) and those who experienced exclusion within the Iraqi political system (Shi'is). However, because of the government's tough line against Communists and the lack of an organized working class, the ICP's membership was limited to a small number of those well-educated people. In 1940, 'the Party began to publishing its new organ, *Al-Shararah* (The Spark), which was modelled on Lenin's publication of the same name. Its initial circulation was only ninety copies, but in 1942, after the Party acquired its own printing press, circulation increased to two thousand copies'.[330]

Marx in Najaf

The first non-political Communist group was founded by 'Ali al-Shibibi and Murtada Faraj Allah in Karbala earlier in 1930. The group aimed at defending the rights of workers and peasants, preparing the ground for the ICP in Najaf. Both al-Shibibi and

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[329] Al-Temimi, K, *Muhammad Jafar Abu al-Timman, Dirasat fi al-Za'ma al-Siyasiya al-Iraqiyya*, 1996, pp.166-9,402,419-23; al-Malah, 'A, *Tarikh al-Haraka al-Dimoqrataya fi al-Iraq*, Baghdad, 1975, pp135-140; Fiyadh, 'A H, ibid, p.192; Batau, ibid.pp.429-30. Abu al-Timman was dubbed by some as a Communist; see for example, Abu Tibikh, M, ibid, pp.42-3, 44-51.

[330] Ismail, T Y, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p.27. *Al-Shararah* resumed publishing in Najaf again after the fall of Saddam Hussain in 2003

Faraj Allah also founded *Lajnat Mukafahat al-Ista'mar* (The Association against Colonialism), another cover organ for Communism in Iraq in 1935. 'Ali al-Shibibi also assisted and supported Kadhim Kishwan, a Najafi teacher to issue *al-Muthl al-'Alia* (The Sublime Ideals), one of the first however short-lived Communist magazines in Najaf in 1941. Both *Al-Muthl al-'Alia* in Najaf and *al-Majalah* in Baghdad were among the most read and popular Communist literature in Iraq. Issuing a Communist magazine in Najaf at that early period certainly indicated a good interest in Communist ideas among Shi'a circles in particular.[331]

Admittedly, the al-Shibibi family had played a major role in disseminating Communism in the small city. Hussain Muhammad al-Shibibi, the Najafi member of the Central Committee of the ICP, who was first influenced by his teacher Kamil Qazanchi, worked actively with Fahd to spread Communism and was the brain behind establishing the first organized Communist cell in the city in 1940.[332] Equipped with persuasive skills, he even attracted people from within *hawza*. According to Hussain Muruwa, who was still close to Shi'i seminary at the time, and later turned into a leading Marxist intellectual in the Lebanese Communist Party, it was Hussain Muhammad al-Shibibi, who introduced *The Communist Manifesto* to him, the book that turned his life upside down from a Shi'i religious *Shaikh* to a secular Marxist. Muruwa maintained that this was a turning point to the extent that he enjoyed reading this book several times as a new breakthrough in his life.[333]

Communists and Shi'i *'ulama*: the contest over social justice

[331] Al-Shibibi, M 'Ali, Min Kitabat Walidi al-Rahil Ali Muhammad Al-Shibibi. www.sotaliraq.com accessed in 13-03-2009; Sbahi, 'A, *'Uqood min Tarikh al-Hizb al-Sha'yoi al-Iraqi*, Damscus-2003, vol, 2, p.212 & p.229.

[332] About the role of Al-Shibibi's family, see Sbahi, A, *'Uqood min Tarikh al-Hizb al-Sha'yoi al-Iraqi*, Damscus-2003, vol, 2, p.133; Al-Shibibi, M 'A, Hussain Muhammad Al-Shibibi, Adeeb, Thaer, Shaheed, *al-Thaqafa al-Jadeedah*, No.4, July-1969.pp.218-227.

[333] Silvia, N, Shi'i-Shuyu'i or How to Become a Communist in a Holy City (255-267) in 'Brunner, R & Ende, W, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times, Religious, Culture and Political History. Leiden.2002.* See also Sha'ban, 'A H, *al-Jawahiri, Jadal al-Sha'er wal Hayat*, ibid, pp.84-6.

One of the main things that explain the advance of the ICP lies in its capability to assimilate Islamic ideas without being a religious movement. Even staunch opponents of Communism admired the Communist creed, pointing in particular to its universal values without attaching itself to a specific religion. In his exile, Shaikh Muhammad Mahdi al-Khalisi confessed that Bolshevism was very popular among Persians in the early and mid of 1920s. Al-Khalisi attributed this appeal to the similarities between Bolshevism and Islam. Al-Khalisi had praised Bolshevism for its principle of equality, abolishing the evils of nationalism, and its treatment of people regardless of their race as the same; however there was one shortage, notably its call for abrogation of religion.[334]

The ICP (at least in its early phase) tended to stress upon the conformity of its values with the Islamic norms, enabling both Shi'i faithful and lay people to become Communists and Shi'is at the same time. A Shi'a critic of Communism observed that many young people embraced Communism mainly because it emanates from the same principles of Islam, or simply because of its good relationship with Islam.[335].

It is worth noting here that Communists in Najaf had realized the importance of 'Ashura ceremonies in serving their political cause. Thus, Communists had been accustomed to organizing their *mawkib* (groupings) mostly among students and teachers in the tenth of *Muharam*. Students, who used to march through the city, would recite their *Hussaini radat* (Hussaini poems) to signify their respect for Imam Hussain. Najafis greatly welcomed and appreciated this *mawkib*, which certainly contributed in popularizing a good image of the Communist movement in the city.[336]

Moreover, Communism had provided Shi'i politicized individuals with a new sense of bold secular zeal after the failure of Shi'i '*ulama* in healing the disparities of the Iraqi political system. Almond has argued that 'Communism provides substitute satisfactions

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[334] Al-Gharawi, A, A (editor), *al-Imam al-Khalisi wa Munadharatuh*, (n.d, n.p.), p.38.
[335] Al-Taib, H M, al-Shua'ayya wal Islam, *al-Idl al-Islami*, No, 6, pp.161-4, 1949, Najaf; 'Ajina, R, ibid. pp.14-15.
[336] 'Ajina, R, ibid.

for those who have broken from traditional religious orientations, or fulfils some deeply rooted human need'.[337] He also indicates that 'negative social mobility' is associated with susceptibility to revolutionary extremism. Persons whose social status has deteriorated, who are on the 'down grade, are likely to be resentful and hence more likely to associate themselves with movements favoring rapid and thoroughgoing political and social change'.[338] On the contrary to commonly held stereotype about supporters of Communist parties, Almond contends that members of Communist parties 'have come more often from pious or religiously observant families, rather than from atheistic or anticlerical ones…more often than not Communists grew up in settings in which religious tradition was observed'.[339] A Good example in this regard was al-Jawahiri.

Al-Jawahiri, who disserted his religious turban earlier, had repeatedly echoed popular Communist themes such as equality and re-distribution of wealth in his poems. He fiercely directed his scathing criticisms to Shi'i '*ulama* describing them as a 'reactionary group', whose task was to thieve *al-Huquq al-Shara'yya* (*Fifth* or *Khums*), from people who deserve this money and who were waiting for their share at the front door of these greedy *'ulama*.[340] By stressing political, economic and social aspects, the Communist movement in Iraq had come forth as the most capable apparatus to address the real needs of the people. This, in turn, explains the success of the ICP in attracting members from religious and well-known families. No wonder, Marxist ideology, loaded with calls of justice, equality and revolutionary perceptions, was welcomed passionately by educated Shi'i particularly poets and radical figures.

'Ajinah stresses that it was intellectual motivation rather than economic reasons that turned him to Communism. 'Ajinah also confesses that he was primarily inspired by

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[337] Almond, G, A, *The Appeal of Communism*, Princeton-New Jersey, Princeton University Press-1954, p.183; Brown, A, *The Rise & Fall of Communism*, ibid.
[338] Almond, G, A, *The Appeal of Communism*, ibid, p.194.
[339] Ibid, pp.210-1
[340] Al-Mafraji, ibid, pp.113-114.

Najaf's history (local resistance to the Ottomans and British alike) and this formed and shaped his future belief in Communism through exposure to Communist literature particularly those published and circulated in Najaf.[341] Obviously, the radical and revolutionary spirit that is shared by both Communism and Shi'ism had been diverted away from a waning Shi'a creed and channeled into Communism, which increasingly appeared more vigorous, strong and promising. As Shi'i *'ulama* had been less active, the ICP thus took their position, inspiring young Shi'is to join it as the most active anti-colonial group in Iraq.[342]

Furthermore, Communists in Shi'a areas had come to picture and interpret Communist ideas according to their religious doctrines. For example, both Communism and Shi'ism laid more stress on justice and equity for all. The worldly dream of re-distribution of wealth among people in both Communism and Shi'ism represents a unique common feature. Similar to Shi'ism, which promises hope for the oppressed to govern the world after eliminating injustice, Communism too satisfies this hope through laying emphasis upon the prospect of creating a classless society. No doubt, Communists' ideologists implemented the idea of class struggle as a weapon against Baghdad's ruling elite to mobilize peasants and workers. The very idea itself reproduces the Shi'a belief of awaited justice accomplished at the hands of the Hidden Imam. It is not surprising that after the July Revolution of 1958, a sense of Communism spread among Iraqi people (in the Shi'a areas in particular) where there would be no need for laws, regulations or orders as all people will enjoy their common wealth.[343]

Shi'i Communist activists and poets had purposely utilized Shi'a symbols to propagate Communist ideas and thoughts. Shi'a symbols like Imam 'Ali, Imam Hussain and Abu

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[341] 'Ajinah, R, *al-Akhtayar al-Mutajadid*, Beirut, 1998.pp.13-4.

[342] See for this point, Martin, P, 'Les Chi'ites d'Iraq', in 'Richard, Y, *Shi'i Islam, Polity, Ideology and Creed*. Blackwell-Oxford-1995.p.112; Chabry, L & Chabry, A, *Politique et minorities au Proche-Orient, les raisons d'une explosion*, pp.156-9; Munson, H, JR, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East*, New York-1988, p.26.

[343] See Sluglett & Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, ibid, p.52.

Dhar al-Ghifari had always been commemorated and applauded for their revolutionary principles as well as employed by Communist poets and writers to disseminate a radical and revolutionary message. Mudhafar al-Nawab, a Communist poet well known for his sharp and radical tone, portrayed Imam ‘Ali as a pioneer of Communist ideology. While he addresses Imam ‘Ali as his Communist master, he criticized his Shi’i fellows for their discouraging stance:

If you come now my master

Then those who call for you will fight you

As they call you a Communist.[344]

In short, Iraqi Communism had almost become a form of secular Shi’ism. Whether this process took place intentionally or spontaneously, the ICP had masterfully combined both deep-rooted Shi’a grievances with popular Shi’a symbols, vision and themes to realize real changes. The ICP had undoubtedly presented itself as a competent organization, which tirelessly struggles to achieve economic, social and above all political change. Owing to the fact that Shi’i ‘*ulama* were loosing attachment to their followers; the Communist party appeared to be the real representative of these masses.[345]

The ascent of Communists in Najaf

Between 1941 and 1945, the ICP expanded its memberships among students, workers and even *falahins* (peasantry). This was due to two reasons; one related to developments in international politics and the other concerns the domestic political situation in Iraq. As they had confronted the same Nazi enemy, the Soviet Union enjoyed good relations with the United States and the Great Britain during this period, enabling Communist

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[344] See al-Nawab, M, *Al-‘Amal al-Kamilah*, (n.p, n.d), p.332.

[345] The Messianic angle has also drawn attention to the similarities between Communism and Christianity. See for example, D’Arcy, *Communism and Christianity*, London, 1956, p.6

parties across the world to abandon its covert activities and to work in the open.[346] For this reason, the ICP had been well received mainly among students within universities and secondary schools alike. The second reason relates to the miserable economic situation in Iraq that presented an opportunity for Communists to prove the validity of their beliefs and arguments. During the years of World War II, prices rose as exploiters and market dealers made easy profits at the expense of poor people. This situation created a wide gap between the rich and the poor and provided Communism with the right moment to flourish.[347]

One feature that marked the history of the ICP, however, had been the tendency to split among rival leaders, which was conducive to weakening the unity of the party. Thus splits befell the party between 1942 and 1944 owing to personal and sometimes divergent minor theoretical disputes though Fahd eventually succeeded in bringing all factions under his leadership thanks to his charismatic and personal commitment.[348]

The ICP experienced a devastating blow amid this apparent triumph, when the Iraqi government executed three of its founding fathers after two years in prison; Yousif Salman Yousif (Fahd), Hussain al-Shibibi (Sarm) and Zaki Muhammad Basim (Hazim) in February 1949. This catastrophe however, had its positive impact upon many Iraqi people who have now come to view the Communists as martyrs. This was true particularly with regard to Shi'i people including *'ulama* who looked at these Communists with esteem. It was reported, that al-Shibibi's father (religious *Shaikh*), had showed mixed feelings, indicating the tragedy of Imam Hussain as the perfect symbol of all martyrs including his son Hussain. Rather than losing its strength, the ICP

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[346] Franzen, J, Education and the radicalization of Iraqi politics: Britain, the Iraqi Communists Party, and the 'Russian link', ibid. pp.99-113.
[347] *Majalat al-Bayan*, No, 5, August, 1946; Marr, P, ibid, pp.59-60; Elliot, M, ibid, p.44.
[348] See Ismail,T, ibid, pp.27-33;

brought in new supporters mostly from within Shi'a circles.[349]

The Communist movement received great support from Najafis in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Although there are no definite figures, Najaf was just behind Baghdad in terms of members affiliated to the ICP. In addition to students, who might have constituted the largest section within the party, the ICP drew on a very important segment in the city; that is weave workers. This group included no less than a few thousands people, concentrated in al-Huwaish quarter of the city.[350] Communists in this quarter had enjoyed the support and protection of Sayyed 'Ali Sayyed Salman, a Communist himself and a leader of the *Zghurit* group. Additionally, the ICP extended its membership to cover the rural areas of Kufa, garnering enormous support from the *falahin* (peasants).[351]

The ICP's Najaf branch seems to have been the most active and the least damaged by the split that hit the party in the late of the 1952. Called *Rayat al-Shighilah* (Banner of the Workers), Najaf's branch emerged during this dispute as a driving force not only in the Mid-Euphrates region but across Iraq. This was mainly due to the strong social connections that tied its networks in Najaf and the exceptional efforts exhorted by Hussain al-Radi (Salam 'Adil), who was soon promoted to be in charge of the Mid-Euphrates region branch.[352] Baha al-Din Nuri, who earlier replaced Fahd in leading the Party, praised the Communists' strength in Najaf in the mid-1950s. According to Nuri, the Communist Party in Kirkuk, the city that was suppose to contain the largest working class in Iraq (due to the presence of the oil industry) and hence the most active Communists, was very weak in comparison with the Holy Cities of Najaf, Kadhamayya

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[349] Al-Shibibi, M, 'Ali, Hussain Muhammad Al-Shibibi, ibid, pp.218-27; Interview with Sayyed Muhammad Bahr-ul 'Ulum, London, 11-01-2003; Ibrahim, B, *Mudhakarat Baqir Ibrahim*, p.24; Sluglett, M, F & Sluglett, P, *Iraq since 1958*, pp.41-2.

[350] Batatu, H, ibid, p.752; Al-Qazwini, J, *'Izul al-Din al-Jazaer, Raed al-Harakat al-Islamayyat fil Iraq*, Dar al-Rafedain, 1st published-2005, pp.293-4; Shakur, K M, ibid, p.77.

[351] Ibrahim, B, *Mudhakarat Baqir Ibrahim*, p.19, 28.

[352] Muderaiyat al-Amin al-Ammah fi al-Jumhurayya al-Iraqayyah, *Al-Harakat al-Shiyoayya fi al-Iraq 1949-1958*, vol, 1, Baghdad, 1966, pp.17-33; Ibrahim, B, ibid.p.52.

and Karbala.[353]

The Party generated its message through creating in 1949 (*Harakat Ansar al-Salam*) the Partisans of Peace Movement. The main aim behind this organ was to win over unaffiliated and independent intellectuals and figures. Prominent poets like Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahri and Muhammad Salih Bahr-ul'Ulum and religious '*ulama* such as Shaikh 'Abdul Karim al-Mashta, Muhammad al-Shibibi and many others joined the Movement.[354]

The ICP emerged in the mid 1950s as a well-organized and strong movement under the leadership of Salam 'Adil. Hussain Ahmad al-Mousawi (1922-1963), known under his *nom de guerre* Salam 'Adil, was a Najafi teacher who belonged to a *Sadah* family.[355] 'Adil was an eloquent orator, poet and writer with full enthusiasm to his creed. He seems to have blended his Shi'a religious background with his new revolutionary cause. Responding to his father who reminded him of the brutality of his enemies, 'Adil defended his cause comparing it with the cause of Imam Hussain.[356]

'Adil not only gathered rival Communist groups under his own personal leadership, but also introduced a more pragmatic direction and theoretical orientation for the party itself. 'Adil made the party more Iraqi and less Soviet with new modification regarding its Arab attitude. The new direction was also made possible due to the new Soviet policies that attempted to strengthen relationship with Arab countries particularly Egypt.[357]

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[353] Nuri, B, D, *Mudhakarat*, p.97.
[354] Agwani, M, S, *Communism in the Arab East*, London-1969, p.67.
[355] Most writers refer to 'Adil with his nickname al-Radi. However, al-Radi was 'Adil's favorite Arab poet and he used to recite his poetry, hence associated with him. See, Naji Yousif.T & Khalid, N, *Salam 'Adil, Sirat Minadhil,* Dar al-Mada-Damascus, 1st published, 2001, vol, 1, p.26. Compare with Franzen, J, *Red Star over Ira, Iraqi Communism before Saddam*, Husrst-London, 2011, p.90; Batatu, H, ibid, pp.712.
[356] An interview with Salam 'Adil's cousin Sayyed 'Ala al-Mousawi, London-6/12/2011.For more and good details about Salam 'Adil, see Naji Yousif, T & Khalid, N, *Salam 'Adil, Sirat Minadhil*, ibid, (vol.1).pp.713-7.
[357] Ismail, T, ibid, pp.46-50.

In fact, the appeal of Communism among the Shi'a community had been increasing. However, it is clear that both Communists and nationalists were competing to attract Shi'is for their cause, focusing particularly on using Shi'a symbols and traditions. While secular and anti-Shi'i modes within Arab nationalism during 1930s made Shi'is less keen on the nationalist movement and more inclined towards the IPC, the new shift of nationalists towards Islam was to change the balance in its favour, especially with the help of the Shi'a *marja'iyya*. A relative of the Shi'a *marja'i* in Najaf reported that during these years it became clear that Communism had 'destructed our tradition as members of our family joined the ICP, the fact that enraged our whole family'.[358] Obviously, the presence of such a perceived Communist threat among Shi'i '*ulama*, who were hitherto non-political group, had contributed in precipitating their engagement in the ongoing contest between nationalists and Communists.

Shi'i '*ulama*: Communist bogy or Arab nationalism?

Between 1923 and 1955, signs of religious decline were felt in Iraq. Like many other Arab and Muslim states, Iraq represents a salient example of how the nation-state radically transformed and constrained the role of '*ulama* within the political arena, and in society in general. The secular nation-state had increasingly marginalized the role of Muslim '*ulama* through its powerful central authority, education system, army, laws and so on. Equally important, state institutions had increasingly become the sole legitimate driving force behind social, economic and political issues, leaving a limited role to Shi'i '*ulama* to function in daily matters. Shi'a Islam, therefore, seems to have given up playing any major role as a moral guid with new forms of secular values and social norms replacing traditional religious customs.

Indeed, the new nation-state challenged the authority of the '*ulama* and laid emphasis upon its own authority, particularly when it comes to the questions of national identity,

[358] Al-Hakim, S, J, *al-Shayyoua'yya wal Din al-Islami*, Najaf, 1959, p.3.

political representation. It is worth mentioning here that the erosion of the authority of the *marja'iyya* in both Iraq and Iran, that took place in parallel between 1921 and 1950, was associated with several though different factors. The emergence of the new nation state in Iraq in 1921 and the ascent of the new military regime in Iran (Rida Shah) not only challenged the authority of *mujtahids* but also led to a secular revolution among the Shi'is themselves.[359]

In Iran under Rida Khan, the 'modernization processes' tightened the grip of the central authority, with the expansion of modern education, transportation and communication systems. The modernization process transformed Iranian society during the 1930s onwards 'into a relatively modern society, with new political and economic institutions, aspirations, and sociocultural values. The modernization of the governmental structure, the changes in the political and economic systems and functions, and the rise of new elites between 1921 and 1941 were instrumental in the transformation of the '*ulama* and the decline of their political power and social status'.[360]

In Iraq, however, other factors led to the diminishing power of the '*ulama*. The staunch opposition of the great *mujtahids* in Iraq, notably Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani, Muhammad Hussain Na'ini and Mahdi al-Khalisi to national elections and the ratification of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922 was a turning point. This opposition ended with a full withdrawal of the grand *mujtahids* from the Iraqi political scene. Most importantly, it led to undermine their standing amongst the Shi'a of Iraq. The unenthusiastic response the *'ulama* received from their followers emboldened the Iraqi government to carry out hostile action against *mujtahids*. The gap widened between *mujtahids* and their Shi'a followers when the former conceded to the Iraqi government, and agreed to conditions not to interfere with future political affairs. Consequently, the position of *mujtahids* as the sole embodiment of Shi'a authority was damaged, paving

[359] Marcinkowski, M. I (2004), *Religion and Politics in Iraq*, p. 26.
[360] Mohammad, H, Faghfoory, the 'Ulama-State Relations in Iran: 1921-1941, *IJMES*, 19, p.413. (1987), pp.413-432. See also Marcinkowski, M. I, ibid, p.33.

the way for new individuals and groups to claim political leadership of the Shi'a community in Iraq.[361]

Thus, Shi'i '*ulama* had to wait for more than two decades before they can gather their efforts to emerge again as a vital power on the Iraqi political stage. Repeated attempts to form an efficient Shi'a body had failed dramatically and consequently a kind of frustration emerged among Shi'i people. Even among '*ulama* themselves, it became obvious that only a proper political group with coherent organization and clear goals could bring about this political change.

At both the government and the opposition levels, there has been a clear division between the minority Sunni elite and the majority Shi'is. Sir H. Mack reported in February 1950 that 'the Shi'a factor 'always comes to the surface when Salih Jabr, who was the first Shi'a Prime Minister of Iraq, is in power, and there are many who are bitterly opposed to Salih Jabr on personal as well as political and community grounds and who are watching for any opportunity to bring him down'.[362]

The first Shi'a groups were set up in 1922 in the hope of confronting the British mandate and the new government. The first was called *al-Nahdha* Party and had an almost pure Shi'i membership and headed by Amin al-Charchifchi. The other was called the National Party and led by Ja'far Abu al-Timman, appealing to people of mixed backgrounds with members of Shi'i, Sunni and other communities. These two parties, however, did not make any break with the prevailing political system. In 1923, Shi'i '*ulama* came under pressure from the Iraqi government with the expulsion of great *mujtahids* for their stubborn opposition to the election. As a result, the quietist and

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[361] Al-Rahimi, 'A A, *Tarikh Al-Harakat A-Islamaya fi al-Iraq*, *al-Jadhoor al-Fikraya wal waqa' al-Tareekhi 1900-1924*, Beirut, 1985, pp.280-283; al-Wardi, *Lamahat*, ibid, vol, 6, pp.215-230, 264-316; Tripp, C, ibid, p.57; Nakash, Y, ibid. pp.90-91; Kadhim, Abbas, ibid, pp.154-9.

[362] EQ 1017/9, No. 4, Sir H. Mack to Mr. Bevin. (Received 28th February, No.43, Baghdad 21 February, 1950). Further more details about sectarianism in the Iraqi politics see, al-Hassani, A.A, ibid,vol, 2, pp.114-5; Gotlieb, Y, Sectarianism and the Iraqi State, in Curtis, M (editor), *Religion and Politics in the Middle East* pp.153-161, USA.1981; Kedourie, E, Anti-Shiism in Iraq under the Monarchy, *MES*, vol, 24, No, 2, 1988.pp; idem, The Shiite Issue in Iraqi Politics, 1941, *MES*, vol.24, No, 2, 1988.pp.496-500.

apolitical trend among Shi'a '*ulama* rooted deeply in Najaf (the same was true in Iran) for the next four decades or so.

Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita led another endeavour supported by tribal *Shaikhs*, who demonstrated their frustration over the shallow Shi'i representation within the Iraqi government. This coalition attempted in 1932 to organize a new association in the hope of gaining more access to the political system. These efforts eventually fulfilled in three small and inefficient groups: *al-Sabah* (Morning) and *al-Ahsan* (Goodness) Associations in Najaf and *Jama'aiyat Shabab al-Shi'ia* (the Association of Young Shi'a) in Baghdad. In July 1932, a group of religious and tribal *Shaikhs* approached Abu al-Timman, in an attempt to form a joint Shi'a coalition. Abu al-Timman rejected this request, however, defending his position on the grounds that he set up his National Party as a non-denominational group to attract Iraqis including Sunnis.[363]

Probably, one of the main reasons that foiled the emergence of a strong Shi'a opposition to Baghdad had been decentralization of *marja'iyya* in Najaf. Between 1923 and 1950, more than ten candidates claimed *marja'iyya* in Najaf alone. In addition to Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani who perhaps stood as the most powerful *marja'i*, other prominent *mujtahids* like Shaikh Muhammad Rida Al Yasin, Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, Sayyed Hussain al-Hamami, Sayyed Mirza 'Abdul Hadi al-Shirazi, Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim and Sayyed Mahmood al-Shahroodi, all had exercised their role as a *marja'a* with varied scopes of followers and influence.[364]

The decentralization of the Shi'a *marja'iyya* had arguably weakened its political and social position as different and sometimes conflicting views were expressed particularly concerning political issues. Admittedly, political issues had always been controversial

[363] See further details about the Shi'i factor during 1920 and 1930, Kedourie, E, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies*, London, 1984, pp.237-285; Chabry.L & Chabry, A, ibid, pp.153-6; Nakash,Y, ibid, Ch.3 & 4.

[364] Al-Fadhli, 'A, Dhikrah al-Shaikh Mirza Muhsin bin al-Shaikh Sultan al-'Abad al-Fadhli al-Ahsaei (1309-14-9), *Al-Mosem*, No, 9/10,vol.3, 1991, pp.144-204.

and pitted Shi'i '*ulama* against their community. Thus, *'ulama* who were involved in politics were seen as swimming against the stream, deserving no respect, and sometimes even disgrace.[365] The ambiguous approach towards political concerns had, therefore, deepened a sense of isolation among Najaf's *'ulama*, who became more inclined to the conservative apolitical trend. Additionally, there had been a clash of interests among the *'ulama* themselves as they entered into conflicting political allegiances that only suited their personal preferences. For example, *Shaikh* 'Abdul Karim al-Jaza'eri and *Shaikh* Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi were standing in diametrical opposition to each other, as they had pursued different stances, prioritizing their stakes with rival Baghdadi politicians.[366] While *Shaikh* 'Abdul Karim al-Jaza'eri supported Yasin al-Hashimi, Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi was opposing him. Other *mujtahids* and '*ulama* had expressed political opinions that were closed to Communist or nationalist groups. *Shaikh* 'Abdul Karim al-Mashta, for instance, is said to have been either a member or fellow-traveler of the Iraqi Communist Party and many *mujtahids* such as al-Jaza'eri's two brothers showed clear support for nationalist parties. As one might expect in a religious milieu like Najaf, a good number of *mujtahids* disdained politics and isolated themselves to their spiritual and intellectual concerns.[367] Thus, it is inaccurate to speak of a united class of Shi'a *mujtahids* in spite of their shared religious beliefs, as well as their awareness of Shi'a political marginalization and oppression, as different political views have almost always divided the clergy. Political and even personal loyalties have always hindered the creation of any kind of Shi'a coalition.

Also, as observed earlier, political division bedeviled the relationship of Najafi '*ulama* with their tribal chiefs in the south and Mid-Euphrates. This division proved itself during the tribal turbulences that swept the Middle Euphrates in 1935. Feelings of frustrations and dissatisfactions that prevailed across the Middle Euphrates areas in the

[365] Hirz-ul-Din, , ibid, v,1, p.44; Al-Qazwini, *'Izul Din al-Jaza'eri*, ibid, pp.287-8.
[366] See chapter 2 for more details.
[367] This attitude has been the mainstream within Najaf's *hawza*.

1930s, pushed Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita to think of a broad alliance among Shi'i people. This attempt, however, brought no fruit as tribal *Shaikhs* made their political choices according to their sole personal preferences.[368]

Shi'i *'ulama*, ICP and Arab nationalists

Around the mid 1950s, both Arab nationalists and the ICP began to pay serious attention to Shi'a *'ulama* as potential allies. As they engaged in a contest over political and social concepts, Nationalists and Communists certainly came to realize the need to secure the support of the '*ulama*. Nationalists and Communists, therefore, had once again framed Islam as part of their debate to prove the validity of their ideology and to denounce the opposite claim. Islam thus became a supplement tool at the disposal of both Communism and nationalism and the Quran was consulted to affirm the words of either Marx or 'Aflaq. Rather than being a first reference of legitimacy or interpretation, the Quran was sought as a secondary source to uphold the contending secular creeds. Secular nationalists and Communists were not seekers of the *'ulama's* wisdom or grace, in fact, they openly despised the *'ulama*, regarding them as a reactionary group in society. Courting the *'ulama* therefore was a pragmatic political tactic manipulated by nationalists and Communists to undermine the status of each other.

To achieve this goal, Iraqi nationalists and Communists had encouraged forming client religious groups, whose task was to endorse their ideology in the name of Islam. Islam, which was relegated for decades, ascended to the front line as a shield, and Shi'a '*ulama* as a form of 'pressure group' to counter their opponent.

However, many Shi'a activists and *'ulama* seemed to have cast doubt over Islam as a playing the role of political ideology. In fact, Islam was viewed as a bare religion

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[368] Al-Dujaili, J, *Mawsua't al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, vol, 4, pp.335-8; Abu Tabikh, M, ibid, pp.58-81, pp.172-9; Lukitz, L, *Iraq, The Search for National Identity*, pp.64-71.

devoid of any genuine political substance and incapable of establishing itself as a viable and realistic option. According to al-Jaza'eri, Shi'a youths have expressed their fulfillment with the appealing Communist ideology, which masterfully defended wretched people in contrast to religious '*ulama* who succumbed to the easy life with no real social and political commitment. Even worse, Shi'i *'ulama*, according to a Najafi Communist- commenting on his father's daily commitments- had no real political and moral devotion that suffices their community. His father, the son continues, had lived an easy life, confined himself only to visiting the Imam's Grave, and coming back to our home to have breakfast, attending his *hawza's* lesson, back again to have watermelon and finally to sleep in the *Sardab* (basement). The Najafi Communist exclaims that his father spares no time to think about the poor and the needy.[369] Clearly, this conversation reflects a deep sense of disappointment among the Shi'a community with Shi'i *'ulama*, who seem to have lost attachment to the real world, and occupied themselves only with trivial religious concerns without giving proper attention to other social and political obligations.

The dwindling power of Shi'i '*ulama* in front of Communism was clearly exemplified in 1948. Alarmed by the strength and influence of Communism, *Shaikh* Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita issued on 27 May 1948 a *fatwa* that prohibited Communist activities in the hope of bringing them down. Kashif al-Ghita , declared that the 'Communist creed is a destructive one for all sanctuaries and laws, demolishing and challenging for every *Sharia'a* (Islamic Law), and it is a big sin and evil to adhere to this thought'.[370] It is not clear whether the *fatwa* was simply a political statement issued to assist Arab nationalists in their fight against Communists in Najaf, however, taking into account the fact that *Shaikh* Kashif al-Ghita was himself a pro-Arab nationalist as was his elder son 'Abdul Halim, the *fatwa* therefore seems to have been in line with his

[369] Al-Qazwini, J, *'Izul Din al-Jaza'eri, Raed al-Haraka al-Islamayya fi al-Iraq*, ibid, p.291.
[370] Al-Fayadh, M, *Tarikh al-Najaf al-Siyasi*, ibid, p.45.

own beliefs.[371] Nationalist activists, nonetheless, applauded the *fatwa*, calling upon all Muslims to stand against Communist deviations and demanding solidarity to eliminate its ghost'.[372] Likewise, Sayyed Ja'far Bahr-ul 'Ulum issued in November 1948 a similar *fatwa*, in which he entreated Muslims in all countries to stem this destructive creed by all means. Surely, nationalist activists, who were disseminating nationalist ideas, encouraged anti-Communist writings through their affiliated magazines such as *al-Adl al-Islami*, *al-Daleel*, *al-Bayan* and *al-Gharai* and other pro-nationalist associations. However, these *fatwas* passed peacefully, causing no serious damage for the ICP's triumph, which seems to have reached an unprecedented level.[373]

Young Shi'a activists had come to realise the pressing need to confront the strong Communist menace. As early as 1940s, 'Izul-l-Din al-Jaza'eri, a son of a Muhammad Jawad al-Jaza'eri- a leading Shi'i *mujtahid,* and the mastermind of *Jama'yat al-Nahdha al-Islamayya*- attempted to organize a new kind of competent political group. The grounds for launching such group was put forward by al-Jaza'eri as a response to 'the widening gap between Islam and Muslim people, making them vulnerable to colonial powers [and] the lack of organized and committed Islamic guidance, which led to defeat. Al-Jaza'eri maintains that there is a serious human need for an organization, which conducts mass awareness and raises cadres for leading these masses to establish Islam again as a governing power in this life for the benefit of human beings'.[374] This group was called *Munadhamat al-Shabab al-Muslim* (*The Organization of Muslims Youth*) and formally established in 1941, setting up its clear goal: Muslim society,

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[371] Appendix, No.16, Confidential, Leading Personalities in Iraq, No.154.No.86.Muhammad Hussain al Kashif al-Ghita FO 481/4; Stansgate Papers, St/274/3.p.1.personalities in Iraq. See also Kashifal-Ghita, M H, *al-Muthul al-'Alya fi al-Islam lafi Bahamdoon*, Beirut-1980, pp.20-37; Bari, A, *al-Mithaq al-'Arabi al-Watani*, Najaf, 1939. See in particular the introduction by 'Abdul Haleem, the son of Kashif al-Ghita, pp.19-30.

[372] Al-Fayadh, M, ibid, p.45.

[373] Marcinkowski, M, I, *Religion and Politics in Iraq*, 2004, pp. 43-44. Marcinkowski mistakenly reported that Kashifal-Ghita's *fatwa* was issued in 1960. In fact, Kashif al-Ghita died in 1954 and his *fatwa* circulated again in 1959/60 during the confrontation with the ICP.

[374] Al-Qazwini, J, *'Izul-l- Deen*, ibid, pp.122-3.

Islamic state, welfare of life and the happiness of the hereafter. The mainstay of this group consisted of *hawza* students but its main audience was meant to be outside the *hawza*. Al-Jaza'eri relied upon some senior '*ulama* for generating his message though he was the sole leader of this organization. In Najaf, both Sayyed Muhammad Jawad al-Tabataba'i and the well-known writer Ahmad Amin participated in spreading the organization's message. In Karbala too, *Shaikh* Muhammad al-Khatib expressed his support to the organization through preaching and lecturing. Further to the constitution and platform, the organization proceeded to issue two regular statements; on a weekly and monthly basis. Adding to the main office in Najaf, other branches were established in Mosul, Basrah, Baghdad and some other provinces.[375]

It seems that a main goal behind the organization was to counter popular Communist propaganda, which succeeded in sweeping through Shi'a areas. According to al-Jaza'eri himself, seventy percent of students attending Najaf's secondary schools were supporters and affiliated with the Communist current; less than three percent supported the nationalist movement and no single voice advocated the Islamists. In such a climate, it is not surprising that the *Organization* had gained very little backing mainly due to a lack of the *marja'iyya's* assistance. In addition, al-Jaza'eri's insignificant knowledge and experience (he was less than 20 years when he set up his organization) and the excessive mystery that surrounded his person and organization may have contributed in limiting the influence of this pioneer Islamic movement.[376]

From the uprising of 1948 to the 1958 Revolution

The last ten years of the monarchy in Iraq witnessed intense political circumstances. Political protests, students' demonstrations and workers' strikes had undermined the credibility of successive Iraqi cabinets and led to the eventual overthrow of the regime

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[375] Al-Qazwini, J, ibid, pp.123-6.
[376] Ibid, p.249 & 290.

in 1958. A very peculiar feature that marked this period had been the increasing role played by 'the street' in the Iraqi politics.[377]

One of the most controversial issues that agitated Iraqi streets and hence provided Iraqi opposition parties with good cause for mobilizing protestors had been the relationship between Iraq and Britain. This relationship was regulated according to the Treaty of 1930. The Treaty granted Britain an access to use Iraqi space, ports and air bases. The Treaty of 1930 was about to expire, when the regime attempted to revise it again in the hope of achieving a breakthrough in the Iraqi-Anglo relations. Protracted discussions and meetings between Iraq, now represented by its first Shi'i Prime Minister Salih Jabr, and Britain started in Baghdad in 1947 and later in Portsmouth in early 1948. Iraqi opposition parties, however, reacted with a series of protests against the agreement that included a protest on 15 January 1948.

Clashes erupted in Baghdad between police and protesters, and left four people dead and several wounded. The incident came to be called *al-Wathba* (Leap) in Iraqi political discourse. Ja'far al-Jawahiri, a brother of the Najafi poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri was among the dead. Political parties, notably the *Istiqlal* party picked this moment to deliver its message and show its force in Najaf. The ICP also organized demonstrations and carried out attacks against a police station in Kufa as well as the British Media Office in the city. Members of the *Istiqlal* party were taken by surprise as this was the first time ever the ICP dared to openly take to the street. Communist-led activities in the city inflamed a new course of retaliation clashes not with the Iraqi government but against nationalists in Najaf. Soon, political confrontation between the two groups heightened and turned to take a new form of social and religious contest directed against each other.[378]

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[377] Marr, P, ibid.p.65.

[378] Zaher, U, the Opposition, in CARDRI, *Saddam's Iraq, Revolution or Reaction*, Zed Books Ltd, London, 2 nd impression, 1990, pp.138-76, see, p.145; Ibrahim, B, *Mudhakarat*, ibid, p.28; al-Fayadh, M, ibid, p.60.

During the 1930s and 1940, rival political groups had often competed over political representation and participation. This Uprising, however, unleashed a deep tension between Communists and nationalists, and most importantly, displayed the strength of the ICP compared with other political groups. The first clash erupted between the two groups over control of the students club in Najaf. As the Iraqi government banned the activities of the club in July 1951, nationalists showed their support for this decision. Waiting for the propitious moment, Communists in Najaf responded with vengeance, attacking a nationalists meeting in August 1952.[379] Realising the strength of the Communists, nationalists came to the conclusion that a propaganda war was needed to win the war against the Communists. Thus, Arab nationalists now turned their attention to another terrain, where they could win at least, the hearts of Najafi Arabs.

Nationalists and Communists: the religio-political campaign

Parallel to the fighting that raged between the Communists and the nationalists, another war spilled over into newspapers, magazines and cultural seminars. Communists and nationalists exchanged attacks to undermine the status of other party. From their part, Communists stepped up their propaganda assault against nationalists, denouncing them for being enemies of *Ahl Al-Bayt* (The Family of the Prophet Muhammad). As Arab nationalists used to glorify the Umayyad period considering it a great Arab state, Communists, therefore, picked this part to prove their claim particularly among Shi'is. Communists, thus, labeled Arab nationalists as foes for *Ahl Al-Bayt* and pro-Umayyad. Iraqi Communists and Shi'i members in particular, had come to identify the Umayyad dynasty as one of the most corrupt dynasties in the history of Islam. This also certifies the above conclusion that Shi'i Communists in Iraq often linked Communist creed to

[379] Confidential, BD 111, 29 November 1952, from USAAIRA Baghdad, Iraq.

their own understanding of Islam (Shi'ism) and did not hesitate to use their Shi'a symbols and models in the service of their political cause.[380]

With assistance of some Shi'i religious *Shaikhs*, the Najafi Communists escalated their attacks against nationalists.[381] Further to win the hearts of Shi'is, Communists probably exploited this claim to bring their foes down in the same way Shi'i '*ulama* had done in the 1920s. In 1926, Shi'i '*ulama* held Sati'a al-Husri responsible for supporting Anis al-Nisuli's infamous book *Tarikh al-Dawlat al-Umawayyat* (History of the Umayyad State). Al-Nisuli, a Syrian teacher who himself was working in Iraq, praised the Umayyad dynasty for its Arab character and great achievements, blaming the Shi'a party for their opposition. Provoked by this book, the Shi'i community responded against the author and those who defended him (al-Husri was at the top of the list).[382] Shi'is who consider the Umayyad dynasty usurpers of Caliphate and responsible for the massacre of Karbala, in which Imam Hussain, his family and companions were slaughtered by the Umayyad army, criticized the Iraqi government for this transgression. Shi'i's anger was renewed again when another controversial book, *al-'Arubat fi al-Maizan* (Arabism in Balance), written by 'Abdul Razaq al-Hisan was published. In this book, al-Hisan dubbed Shi'is as Persian, originating from the remains of the Sasanids in Iraq; consequently they had no right to claim representation within Iraqi governments.[383]

Arab nationalists in Iraq, on the other hand, were accustomed to portray Communism as a *Shu'ubiyya* movement, full of hatred for Arab people and working at the disposal of

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[380] See how some Shi'i communists reflected their creed on interpreting Arab and Islamic history, Murawah, H, *Al-Naza'at al-Madayyah fi al-Falsafah al-'Arabayya al-Islamayya*, vol,1 in particular.
[381] Al-Fayadh, M, ibid, pp.82-4.
[382] For more details, see al-'Omari, Khairy, *Hikayat Siyasaya min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Hadeeth*, Cairo, 1969, pp.146-172; al-Hassani, 'A A, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqayya*,vol,2, pp.88-9, vol.3.pp241-3; Bashkin, O, 'When Mu'awiya Entered the Curriculum'- Some Comments on the Iraqi Education System in the Interwar Period', pp.40-60, in Kadi, W & Billeh, V, *Islam and Education, Myths and Truths*, Chicago, 2007.
[383] See al-'Alawi, H, *al-Taetherat al-Turkeyat fi al-Mashroua' al-Qawmi al-Arabi fi al-Iraq*. p.144.

Zionism, Persians and the like.[384] However, Arab nationalists had mainly targeted first non-Arab elements in the ICP such as Jews and Persians. There is evidence that Shi'a nationalists frequently used the term *Shu'ubiyya* as a reference to disregard non-Arab members in the ICP in particular.[385]As we shall see in chapter five, Arab nationalists (Sunnis in particular) turned this term later into a label against both Shi'is and Kurds in accordance with the changing political circumstances in Iraq, the internal contest within the nationalist front itself and in response to external developments.

Thus, Iraqi Jews were the first victims of Arab nationalists not only because Jews represented a good number in the ICP but mainly due to the Palestinian crises. It is true that Jews became vulnerable to verbal offences as early as the 1930s but this onslaught dramatically changed after 1948. From this moment onwards, Arab nationalist literature became obsessed with the 'Jewish Conspiracy', ascribing all divisions that befell Muslims, such as the Sunni-Shi'i schism, the assassination of the Caliph 'Othman in 36/656, the series of civil wars (al-Jamal 36/656, Sefin 37/657 and al-Nahrawan 38/658) and many other events to Jews who either committed them, or planned them with evil intent.[386] Salman al-Safwani, an ardent Shi'i nationalist, depicts *al-Shuya'aeen* (Communists) as *Shu'ubiyeen*, foreign clients rather than patriots, criticizing them for defending (Jewish people). He insists on the importance of conducting *al-Tathir qabl al-Tahrir* (purging before liberation) in order to eliminate the country of its betrayers, alluding to Communists, before completing liberation.[387]

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[384] *Shu'ubiyya* term refers to the literary and intellectual movement that emerged during the Abbasid period, calling for equality for non-Arab people and sometimes denouncing the Arab people for their acclaimed inferiority of other nations. See for example, Lewis, B, *The Arabs in History*, London, 1958, p.93.

[385] Kashif al-Ghita, 'A, 'al-Shu'ubiyya fil al-Sayyasah wal Tareekh', al-*'Itidal,* No, 2, April-1946, p.367. See chaper two about this point.

[386] See for example, al-Hisan, 'A A, *al-'Arubat fi al-Mizan*, These battles took place among Muslim themselves during the reign of Imam 'Ali.

[387] Al-Safwani, S, *Hadhah al-Shu'ubiyya*, Baghdad, 1954, pp.3-6 &8-9, 23. Al-Safwani, a radical nationalist, originally comes from the Shi'i community of the Saudi Arabia. He received his early *hawza* learning together with Fadhil al-Jamali (became prime minister later) and

Later on, the term *Shu'ubiyya* was specifically designated to mean Communists of Persian origin. These Communists, al-Dujaili argues:

'Have been trying their best to dehumanize the Arabs owing to the fact that the Arabs demolished the Persian empire, hence, the Persian did not forget what took place in *Dhi Qar* and *al-Qadisayya*…the Persians know that our religion is Arab, this religion that made Arabs the conquerors of the whole world in the dint of their morals and message'.[388]

Al-Dujaili, who places blame on the 'Abbasids as 'they did not show any care for Arab nationalism', brings attention to the *Shu'ubiyya* of today; namely those who live among Arab people and belong to this nation yet they represent its potent enemy as a majority of them are not Arab'. Elaborating on this further, al-Dujaili describes *Shu'ubiyya* as Carmathians and Tatars, 'who perpetrated their crimes in the name of Communism'.[389]

No surprising, Shi'a nationalists seem to have been willing to compromise with their Sunni counterparts over controversial historical interpretation through overlooking and neglecting them in order to escape disagreements. In a curriculum historical text written in 1948, the two Shi'a authors dealt swiftly with the events that happened during the reign of the Caliph 'Othman and later during Imam 'Ali. According to al-Fayyadh and al-'Adhadh, Persian elements had championed the 'Alid party so as to get rid of the Umayyads. It is clear that the authors were trying to place blame on the Persians rather than on (Arab) 'Abbasids or the Umayyads because 'Persians were dreaming of recreating their past Persian glory.[390] Furthermore, some Shi'i nationalists went further to adopt the nationalist view that considers the Umayyad era as the ideal example of Arab glory and the Umayyads as real defenders of Arabism in the face of *Shu'ubiyya*

Muhammad Mahdi Kuba (minister and the leader of the Istiqlal Party later) in Kadhamayya at the hands of Imam Mahdi al-Khalisi.

[388] Al-Dujaili, A, A, *al- Shu'ubiyya wa Shou'raha*, pp.4-7.

[389] Al-Dujaili, A.A, *al- Shu'ubiyya wa Idwaraha al-Tareekhayya fi al-Alam al-Arabi.*pp.81-2. Carmathian is a radical branch of Isma'ilis, governed mainly Bahrain between the tenth and eleventh centuries.

[390] Al-Fayyadh, A, A & al-'Adhadh, M, H, *Arab History*, A Text book for the Iraqi secondary schools, Baghdad,1948, pp.49-55 & pp.82-3

conspiracies conducted by Arab enemies notably Persians. Defending the Umayyads, al-'Ijli depicts Arab history under their rule as:

'The brightest page, when Arabism advanced ahead under the leadership of the Umayyads… the Umayyad reign is the time of pure and bright national glory as well as great Arab sovereignty… I think that Arab nationalism reached its peak during the Umayyad reign'.[391]

This compromising position taken by some Shi'a nationalists towards Arab history gave Shi'a Communists a good opportunity to display their sympathy towards Shi'a beliefs in contrast to the nationalists who were portrayed unfaithful traitors.[392]

Obviously, the propaganda war was mainly aimed at Shi'is who seemed primarily torn between nationalists and Communists. Each part had attempted to view Arab and Islamic history through its prism merely for ideological and political ends. Understandably, the main focus of this debate was given to Shi'i '*ulama* in the hope of wining their hearts and minds. Cognizant of the prospects of this fierce political dispute, Shi'i '*ulama* became more concerned and cautious towards the warring parties.

As they realised the strength of ICP, nationalists looked upon Shi'i '*ulama* to determine this war. In 1953, a group of nationalists visited Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim in his home aiming at obtaining a *fatwa* against the ICP. Al-Hakim clearly stated that he would stand against any atheist group; however he dismissed the idea of issuing a *fatwa* and did not accept any attempt to persuade him otherwise.[393] Al-Hakim, who himself knew few members of his relatives within the ICP, was reluctant to engage in this political and ideological contest.[394]

With the growing threat of Communism in the whole world and particularly for the United States and the Western block during the Cold War, both the American and British Ambassadors in Baghdad thought of collaboration with Islamic associations and

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[391] Al-'Ijly, M, *Durous Qawmayya*, vol, 1, Najaf, 1949, pp.20-1.
[392] Shukar, K M, ibid, pp.79-80.
[393] Shukar, K M, ibid, pp.80-1.
[394] Sbahi, 'A, *'Uqood min Tarikh al-Hizb al-Sha'yoi al-Iraqi*, ibid, vol, 2, p.319; al-Qazwini, *'Izul Din*, ibid, pp.255-6.

Muslim ‘*ulama* as a good means to deter the Communist threat in Iraq. Visiting Najaf in 1953, the American and British Ambassadors met several ‘*ulama* there. The Ambassadors hoped cooperation notably with Kashif al-Ghita who was singled out as one of the most hardline opponents of Communism. Surprisingly enough, Kashif al-Ghita not only abstained from issuing another *fatwa* against Communists but also blamed the British and Americans for spreading Communism amongst Iraqis. Kashif al-Ghita was approached again in 1954 when was invited to take part at a conference organized by the Americans. Christian and Muslim scholars were present in a conference, which was held in Lebanon to discuss the challenges that confront both Christianity and Islam, most notably by their perceived Communist opponent. Kashif al-Ghita, who declined the invitation, proffered his ideas in a treatise. In it, he maintained that ‘threat of Communism cannot be thwarted unless freedom and social justice is fulfilled, through uprooting sources of oppression and aggression’. While he condemns the partition of Palestine and the British and French imperial role in the East, Kashif al-Ghita alleviates the ‘danger posed by Communism in comparison with the previous threat. Communism, argued Kashif al-Ghita, neither invaded an Arab country, nor took over any land or wealth. It is you (the English) that we should take the blame for the Cold War and the Communist penetration in every country including Najaf’.[395]

Kashif al-Ghita, who had issued a fierce statement against Communism in 1948, reiterates here not only the nationalist ideas but also shows a tolerant line towards the Communists. By emphasizing the significance of the Palestine question, Kashif al-Ghita echoes the Arab nationalist position that places blame on both the British and the Americans for this crisis. On the other hand, Kashif al-Ghita may have attempted to condone any charges made against Communists as he realized their political weight in

[395] Kashif al-Ghita, M H, *al-Muthul al-‘Alya fi al-Islam lafi Bahamdoon*, Beirut-1980, pp17-20.

Iraq in general and their presence in Najaf in particular after their central role in the Iraqi national demonstrations of 1948 and 1952.

Under the influence of Mosaddaq in Iran, notably his nationalisation program of oil in 1951 and the Egyptian Revolution in July 1952, the ICP organized student demonstrations in Baghdad and workers strikes in Basrah. On 22 November 1952, demonstrations began in Najaf and clashes ensued between protestors and the police. The scale of these unprecedented demonstrations brought Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf under huge pressure particularly after the leading role played by Abu al-Qasim al-Kashani in Iran during Mosaddaq's movement.[396] Both Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita and Muhammad Jawad al-Jaza'eri played a noted role in supporting these demonstrations and attacking the Iraqi government. Although none of Shi'i '*ulama* showed sympathy for any specific party, it is still important to underline their participation. The *'ulama*'s participation in these political activities was indisputable endorsement to the opposition groups and showed a rift with the regime.

Time and again, regional events especially in the Arab region made Iraq susceptible to new political developments. In 1955, the Iraqi government signed the Baghdad Pact with Britain, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran. Soon after that, Naser, who rebuked the Pact, waged a propaganda war against the Iraqi government. Later on the nationalisation of the Suez Canal was followed by the tripartite aggression of Israel, France and Britain, which enraged Arab countries. Iraqi opposition groups seized this opportunity to attack the regime in a new wave of demonstrations in Iraqi cities amidst the deep political crisis that resulted from the cancellation of the 1955 election.[397] On 26 November 1956, the day of the Israeli attack on Egypt, protestors in Baghdad, Hay and Najaf swept the streets, closing schools and stores with huge gatherings denounced the aggression. Protestors who expressed anger against the Iraqi government, also called for sending

[396] FO 481/7, Enclosure in No.1. Iraq: Annual Review for 1952, Sir J. Troutbeck to Mr.Eden (No.12 Confidential), Domestic and Foreign Affairs,
[397] FO 481/9, Sir Michael Wright to Mr.Macmillan, No.135.Confidential, June 15 1955,

troops to support Egypt. In the second day, Najaf witnessed huge gathering with police forces deployed in every corner of the city. Clashes broke out with the police forces as demonstrators were marching towards the Holy Grave of Imam ‘Ali. The clashes resulted in a few casualties. In the third day, police forces surrounded *al-Khournaq* and *al-Sadeer* Schools and opened fire once the students began demonstrating. Two students were shot dead; Ahmad al-Dujaili from *al-Khournaq* and ‘Abdul Amir al-Shaikh Radhi from al-*Sadeer*.[398] This incident aggravated the situation, leading to further demonstrations in the city with another four people killed and a few injuries. Protestors carried their casualties and brought them before Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim’s house. Police fled the streets, deserting the city for its own people, who formed a small committee with Shaikh Ahmad al-Jaza’eri as one of its members. This committee took charge of running the city’s affairs and contact with the *‘ulama*. The unique thing about the 1956 demonstrations was not the scale but the form of organization and participation. It was for the first time that the main political parties in the city (*Istiqlal*, ICP, the Ba’th and National Democratic Party) agreed to work together. This was made possible after a mediating role exerted by Salam ‘Adil, the secretary general of the ICP in coordination with other opposition parties in particular the *Istiqlal* and the National Democratic Party in May 1954.[399] The ‘*ulama* participation was unparalleled and provided protestors with political and moral support in the face of the Iraqi regime. Despite the fact that these parties represented different ideological orientations, their united front during demonstrations displayed a new sense of national solidarity among Iraqi people and unquestionable objection to the regime. Thanks to this new understanding, the main Iraqi political powers were able to form a new body, which was realized in 1957. This united front took the responsibility of preparing the ground for

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[398]Al-Haboobi, A, ‘Musahamat al-Najaf fi Sad al-‘Udowan al-Thoulathi ‘ala Misr fi 1956’, *Al-Mosem,* 1991; Hamedi, J, ‘A, *Intufadhat al-Iraq ‘am 1956*, Baghdad-2000.pp.235-271.

[399] See Sbahi, A, *‘Uqood min Tarikh al-Hizb al-Sha’yoi al-Iraqi*, Damscus-2003, vol, 2, pp204-5; Ismaeil, T, ibid, p.51.

the next step, and although this front itself did not cause the Revolution of 1958, it succeeded nonetheless in bringing together the divided Iraqi powers to defeat the old monarchical regime.

Conclusion

The Iraqi state that was created in 1921 was a result of a last-minute compromise made by the British administration and the Sharifian Officers at the expense of the Shi'a majority. Excluded from real power in Baghdad, the Shi'a community went to the opposition front where they scattered in varied political groups.

Young Shi'a generation engaged actively within the opposition groups, having a good presence within the Arab nationalist trend and the dominant majority inside the Communist group. Political activism of Shi'a youths reflected a deep sense of discontent against the Iraqi political regime, on the one hand, and the stagnation of the Shi'a religious community in the holy cities on the other.

Since the mid -1950s, Shi'a religious community showed a new political engagement as a response to the intense political competition between the ICP and nationalist trends. Najaf's position as an arbiter and backup increased, giving '*ulama* a proper moment to express their political views. The period between 1952 and 1958 was a transitional phase in the history of Najaf *'ulama*, as political activism became more obvious within the Shi'a *marja'iyya*. Transition from the old monarchy regime to the Republic opened the way not only for rival parties to compete for power, but also for the Shi'a *marja'iyya* to emerge as an active part within the Iraqi landscape. This new role clearly manifested itself immediately after the July 1958 Revolution as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Najaf and Qasim's rule 1958-1963

Shi'a Religio-Politics: Internal Causes and External Factors

On 14 July 1958, a successful coup d'etat overthrew the monarchy in Iraq. Opening a new course in Iraqi history, this episode has brought about, among many other things, two lasting changes in the Iraqi arena. At the internal level, the demise of the monarchy has transformed Iraq forever from a hierarchal kingdom into a republican system characterized by its new political, social and economic facets. With regard to the external level, Iraq has increasingly become vulnerable to the political competition of Arab and regional powers. The latter factor has largely determined not only the fate of Qasim's republic but also the future governments until recent days. For its part, Najaf was deeply involved at both the internal and external levels, as Najaf's *marja'iyya* engaged for the first time in complicted ideological and political conflict that later ended with the triumph of the nationalists at the expense of Qasim and the ICP.

I shall try, therefore, in this chapter to answer a two-dimensioned question; that is how did the cordial relationship between Qasim and the Shi'i *marja'iyya* dramatically transform into an open enmity and how did internal and external factors affect Najaf's decisions in this regard?

In answering this question, I shall examine Najaf's stance over political strife in Iraq, the changing mode of relationship with the Baghdad authority (Qasim) and no less important its connections with both Egypt and Iran as main regional players involved in this period. I shall review these internal and regional developments within the context of the Cold War, and its effects on the Iraqi landscape in particular. By doing so, I undertake to explore how both internal and external factors had shaped the stance of Shi'i '*ulama* towards Qasim, and hence contributed to bringing the regime down.

Instead of focusing solely on Iraqi internal events and factors as many other scholars have done, I shall expand the horizon of my analysis to cover other dimensions (Nasir's role and the Shah's policies). This important yet neglected aspect is necessary to achieve proper understanding of religious activities in Najaf and political events in Iraq in general.

Najaf and Qasim: a good short honeymoon

The leaders of the 14 July Revolution (came to be called later the Free Officers) received good reception by all Iraqi sectors. From the outset, the new authority initiated decisions and orders that left impressive effects upon all Iraqis. Sunni, Shi'is and Kurds all found themselves represented in the first government with positions assigned to the political parties of the National Front including the *Istiqlal*, the NDP and the Ba'th. Giving new hopes to Iraqis, ordinary people also felt a new change as the old regime was eliminated together with its entire dominant and hereditary classes.[400]

This positive reception was to soon disappear as the governing group degenerated into internal strife. Barely two months after their successful takeover, 'Abdul Karim Qasim and 'Abdul Salam 'Arif, who were regarded as the two leaders of the coup, engaged in clear conflict to end with a final divorce in November 1958, relieving 'Arif from all his positions. Apart from different personal characters, rivalry between the two figures revolved around one major issue: priority of Iraqi nationalism or Arab nationalism. While Qasim has increasingly showed a great deal of enthusiasm for Iraqi nationalism, 'Arif took the side of Arab nationalists, calling for an immediate unity with the United Arab Republic, which brought together earlier in February 1958 both Egypt and Syria.[401] Qasim who expressed reformist rather than revolutionary ideas, hence was close to the National Democratic Party (NDP) and Iraqi patriotism rather than ICP, was

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[400] Marr, P, *The Modern History*, ibid, p.98; Sluglett & Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, pp.51-2.

[401] Dann, U, *Iraq under Qasim, A Political History, 1958-63*, Tel Aviv University, 1969, pp.69-76; Kimball, L, K, *The Changing Patterns of Political Power in Iraq, 1958 to 1971*, New York, 1972, 1st edition, pp.90-2; Batatu, ibid, pp.817-30.

to turn his direction after 'Arif's rift more towards the ICP and became close to the left. Thus, unlike the first cabinet that was formed immediately after the revolution and excluded any person with left affiliations, the second cabinet that was formed on 7 February 1959 'included ministers sympathetic with left-wing groups in order to counterbalance the initial ascendancy of the pan-Arab'.[402]

Despite the fact that the relationship between Qasim and the ICP was a kind of 'temporary marriage', nonetheless they shared to some extent similar ideological orientations and political interests. Losing the support of his close military and national elements (first 'Arif and then nationalist groups after the Mousl revolt of March 1959), Qasim moved swiftly towards the ICP, hoping to ensure its support to the new republic. The ICP, on its part, found in Qasim a promising instrument to realise the party agenda, and perhaps their share in Baghdad's authority.[403]

The ICP's powerful stand soon proved to have left its marked influence upon Qasim's political directions at both internal and external levels. It was clear that domestic changes in Iraq were accompanied with revolutionary mutations in Iraq's foreign affairs as relocation occurred from one side to the opposite. This manifested itself with shifting Iraq's tendency towards the Communist block and setting up relationships with the Soviet Union. It was also confirmed by Qasim's decision to withdraw from the Baghdad Pact. These two acts not only re-shaped Iraq's polarization from the west (United States and Britain) but also affected its regional relationships, espically with Iran and Turkey. These two states, which were considered close friends and allies as they were members of the Baghdad Pact, suspected the new Iraqi shift towards the Soviets and the rise in Communist influence.

With regard to internal policy, the ICP also exerted its influence through decisions and

[402] Khadduri, M, *Republican Iraq, A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p.99; Agwani, M, S, *Communism in the Arab East*, p.115.

[403] FO 371/140896, Confidential, No.9, Annual Report, 1958, British Embassy, Baghdad, January 29, 1959; FO 371/149839, Confidential, No.1, Annual Report, 1959, British Embassy, Baghdad, January 1, 1960; Slauglett, ibid, p.54; Agwani, M,S, ibid, p.117.

measures that were taken by Qasim. As part of his new reform program, Qasim introduced in September 1958 the Agrarian Reform Law. According to this Law, a ceiling on land ownership was imposed, with a 'maximum of personal holdings in land, whatever title it had, was limited to 1,000 donums (618 acres) in irrigated land, 2,000 donums in rainfall land'.[404] Despite the fact that this Reform was inspired by reformative rather than radical minds and probably designed to weaken the Communist influence among Iraqi peasants, it ultimately lead to fulfilling the aspirations of the Iraqi Communist.[405] As was expected, this Reform caused dissatisfactions among the big tribal *Shaikhs* within Shi'i, Sunni and Kurdish communities. Sunni tribal *Shaikhs* (especially Shamar) openly expressed their discontent through the Mosul revolt of March 1959. Kurds did the same when they joined the Barazani military uprising later in 1960.[406] In comparison with the northern regions, the Shi'i areas appeared less affected by this Reform, as the confiscated lands were proportionally small and limited. The land Reform, in fact, had caused no serious damage in Shi'a provinces such as Najaf and other regions, except for Kut province in the south, where the biggest landholders existed. In Karbala (Najaf was part of Karbala), for instance, only 1635 donums were confiscated and were re-distributed between 85 beneficiaries.[407] This probalbly explains the moderate attitude taken by Najafi '*ulama* towards Qasim unlike their counterparts in Iran. Surely, the Land Reform in Iraq had caused less trouble for Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq compared with their Iranian counterparts, as the former enjoyed no significant landholding. However, this attitude is accounted by the fact that the contribution of Iraqi landowners to *khums* money was marginal, if any; hence, no

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[404] Gabbay, R, *Communism and Agrarian Reform in Iraq*, Croom Helm, London-1978, p.109.
[405] FO 371/140918, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad to Sir Roger Stevens, London, July 2, 1959; Gabbay, R, ibid, pp.112-3.The mastermind of this Reform was Muhammad Hadid, Qasim's personal counselor before the revolution and served as the Minster of Finance under Qasim.
[406] Marr, P, ibid, pp.105-6; Sluglett, ibid, pp.104-6.
[407] Wizarat al-Irshad, *Thawrat arba'at ashar Tamooz fi 'Amiha al-Rabi'a*, Baghdad, 1962, pp.481-3.

damage accrued to the *marja'iyya*'s financial sources. Land Reform had been significant though as it revealed the scope of the Communist influence upon Qasim and their involvement in his regime.[408]

Shi'i *'ulama*, in fact, expressed their good will towards Qasim at a very early stage. Qasim, who paid a hospital visit to Sayyed al-Hakim, received a thank you letter from al-Hakim in Muharam 1378/ 1958, expressing his 'content with the happy news of great steps during this short period, the thing that entail you (Qasim) greatness'. Qasim replied with a short letter, wishing the 'support of the *umma* (people) and blessing of religious imams'.[409] Qasim who had received a special welcome by Iraqis greeted with a statue in the heart of the holy city.[410] Delegates and some '*ulama* from Najaf often visited Qasim in Baghdad and sometimes received Qasim's envoys in Najaf. Support, sympathy and allegiance were announced to the new republic.[411] 'Abdul Halim Kashif al-Ghita, a son of Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, celebrated the July Revolution as a continuing legacy of Imam Hussain's rebellion against oppressors. Iraqis, Kashif al-Ghita states, 'learned from Karbala how not to tolerate oppression and tyranny, hence 'we have to achieve the great goals Imam Hussain sought to establish in righteousness, justice and liberation'.[412]

The Qasim-'Arif's dispute in Baghdad impacted Najaf's atmosphere, and further poisoned relation between the warring parties in the Holy City. Religious ceremonies and school venues became battlegrounds for Communists and Arab nationalists. In September 1958, supporters of ICP and Arab nationalists engaged in a street fight in Najaf. A religious celebration of the Prophet's death developed first into zealous but peaceful shouting; Arab nationalists calling for Naser and united Arab nation vis-à-vis

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[408] For a different view, see Jabar, F, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, p.76.
[409] Al-Saraj, 'A, *al-Imam Muhsin Al-Hakim 1889-1970*, Beirut, pp.317-8.
[410] *Al-Najaf*, No.1, 14 July 1959.p.62.
[411] *Al-Gharai*, No.1/2/3, special issue dedicated to celebrating the July Revolution.p.7.
[412] *Al-Najaf*, No, 2, 1959, p.84.

Communists who defended Qasim's federal policy.[413] On 5 November 1958, fighting broke out in *al-Sadeer* School, where rival students clashed over the contested figures and slogans: Nasir and his Arab call and Qasim with his Iraqi attitude.[414] Communism's powerful ascendance became visible as the ICP emerged as the best-organized power with their indisputable role in eliminating the nationalist disturbances in Mosul in March 1959. The ICP, which expounded sure support to Qasim against 'the enemy of the republic', soon swept every sector of the state taking advantage positions within media, unions and even para-military groups. The ICP thus, dictated press, formed students, workers and women's unions and was the backbone of both the Popular Committees for the Defence of the Republic and the Popular Resistance Militia. A good indication of the ICP's great influence and popularity in the middle of 1959 could be concluded from:

'The wide circulation of the Party's paper [*Ittihad al-Sha'b*], which reached around 23,000 readers. All other papers had a circulation of only about 10 per cent of this number. Furthermore, the number of Party members and candidates waiting to join the Party exceeded 20,000. Party front organizations such as the League for the Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights reached 40,000 members; the Iraqi Union of Democratic Youth had 84,000 members; the National Congress of Peasant Societies claimed to have 2,000 societies under its umbrella, totaling some 250,000 members; and the General Union of Labour reckoned that it represented fifty-one labour unions with a membership of 275,000'.[415]

The ICP's mighty presence sent a warning sign to Qasim himself, the nationalist opposition and most importantly to the Shi'i *marja'iyya*. However, as Qasim and the ICP formed a close alliance, Iraqi nationalists moved gradually towards Shi'i '*ulama* in the hope of securing their support against Qasim. Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf seem to have

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[413] Al-Janabi, 'A, *Tarikh al-Najaf al-Ijtima'i 1932-1968*, ibid, pp.282-8.
[414] Ibid, p.226.
[415] Ismail, T, Y, *The Rise and fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, ibid, p, 79 & 91. See also, Mudarayyat al-Amin al-'Amah, *Al-Harakat al-Shau'ayya fi al-'Iraq*, Baghdad-1966, vol, 2, pp, 71-2, p.107.

been worried over this political polarization. Sayyed al-Hakim, who was still on good terms with Qasim himself, preferred, for unclear reasons, to send a letter to Najib al-Rubaiei, the Head of the Sovereignty Council, concerning Nadhim al-Tabaqchali and Rifa'at al-Haj Seri and some other nationalist officers who were arrested during the Mosul troubles.[416] Although, al-Hakim's petition was a moral support rather than sympathy towards nationalists, Iraqi Communists were probably displeased as they regard such a move as a sign of potential coalition between nationalists and 'reactionary religious men'.[417]

Countering Communism: formation of *Jama'at al-'Ulama*

Shi'i '*ulama* began to display great concerns over the rising tide of Communist activities. Al-Hakim who had become extremely obsessed with the increasing infiltration of the Communist current, particularly within Shi'i community, instructed his close circle to form a counter-Communist machine to hinder the Communist advance.[418]

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[416] Al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, pp.295-6.
[417] Zahher, U, the Opposition, in, CARDRI, ibid, p.164.
[418] Anon (al-Hilaw, 'A), al-*Harakat al-Islamayya fi al-'Iraq*, Beirut-1985, pp.16-7.

Thus, on 22 January 1959, a small group of Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf announced the formation of *Jama'at al-'ulama* (The Society of the 'Ulama). The announcement took place during the celebration of Imam 'Ali's birthday, where a letter from Qasim addressed to the attendants, received applaud and appraising poems. Muhammad Sadiq al-Qamousi and Muhammad Jamal al-Hashimi praised in their poems the leadership of Qasim for his kindness and braveness.[419] The significance of this meeting, as we will see, is that it was the moment that *Jama'at al-'Ulama* openly declared its appearance as an organized means to encounter the activities of Communist movement.[420]

The fabric of *Jama'at al-'Ulama* reflected to a great extent its traditional components and concerns. The group was headed by three members; Ayatollah Shaikh Murtadah Al Yasin, Ayatollah Shaikh Hussain al-Hamdani and Ayatollah Shaikh Khudir al-Dujaili. The group included in addition to the supervision committee, Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Taqi Bahr-ul'Ulum, Ayatollah Sayyed Musa Bahr-ul'Ulum, Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Shakhs, Ayatollah Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar, Ayatollah Sayyed Murtadah al-Khulkhali, Ayatollah Shaikh Muhammad Tahir Al al-Shaikh Radi, Ayatollah Shaikh Muhammad Jawad Al Al-Shaikh Radi, Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Ayatollah Shaikh Muhammad Hassan al-Jawahiri, Ayatollah Sayyed Ismail al-Sadr and Ayatollah Shaikh Muhammad Taqi al-Ayrawani.[421] As it is clear, the group included mainly senior '*ulama* and assisted with the help of some enthusiastic junior religious men. Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim, who was directly involved in constructing this society, declared his full support to its chief

[419] *Jama'at al-'Ulama*, Najaf-1959, p. 40 & p.47. See also *al-Gharai*, 14 February 1959, No2/3.p.44. This contradicts the view that Shi'i '*ulama* took negative attitude from start to Qasim. See Marcinkowski, M I, *Religion and Politics in Iraq*, ibid, p.43.

[420] Jabar states that *Jama'at al-'Ulama* was founded in 1960 relying on both Bahr-ul al- 'Ulum and Baqir al-Nasiri testimonies. However, the correct date is 22 January 1959 according to the pamphlet that published by the society itself. See Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, p.110.

[421] The full list cited in Shaikh al-Numani, M R, *Shaheed al-Umat wa Shahidaha* (2 vols), part.1, p.249, Qum, 1421. Compare with, Aziz, T, M, The Role of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980, *IJMES*. 25(1993), 207-22, see footnote, 6; Willey, J, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, Appendix 1, p.157.

Shaikh Murtada Al Yasin, who steered its affairs and direction with one clear objective: to counter Communist activities in Iraq. Al-Hakim also prescribed the Shi'i faithful to support the society whether by paying their *khums* money directly to the society or by donating other financial duties in order to fund its activities to defend the integrity of Islam.[422] Further to *al-Adhwa*, the mouthpiece of the society, which was published in Najaf, circulating across Iraq, varied publications and pamphlets, and other similar activities were funded and supported to express the Islamic response to the Communist encroachments.

From the start, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr demonstrated his devotion to the activities of this group so he assumed the responsibility of writing the editorial of *al-Adhwa*, under the title *Risalatuna* (Our Message). A major theme that runs through *Risalatuna* is the call to revive Islam, and to come up with answers to the modern challenges posed by Marxism and other Western ideologies. Al-Sadr emphasised the need to bring again into life, Islamic principles in society, as Islam is qualified to provide a coherent and satisfying creed to meet the political, social and religious needs of people. In fact, al-Sadr's editorial content, language and tone had echoed the revivalist tendency of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abdou and Hassan al-Bana and seemed far from traditional Shi'ism. In sum, al-Sadr was calling to renew Islam in order to face the Communist challenge.[423]

Al-Sadr's activism undoubtedly was a reflection of the prevailing political, cultural and religious circumstances in Iraq, as well as his own social milieu. Al-Sadr, who was born in 1935 to a well-known Iraqi family, continued his family's legacy of religious learning. His great grandfather Sadr al-Din al-Sadr (master of Shaikh Murtada al-Ansari) was a great scholar, who traveled between Lebanon, Iraq and Iran to teach before returning to Najaf, where he lived his last days, and where he was buried there.

[422] Al-Saraj, 'A, ibid.p.297.
[423] See *Risalatuna*, Qum-1421, pp.9-38.

Ismail, his direct grandfather, too, was a renowned scholar in Najaf and a master of Mirza Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini. Al-Sadr received his early education in *Madaris al-Nashr* Elementary School (a branch of al-Mudhafar's religious schools in Najaf) in Kadhamayya, where he lived under the auspices of his elder brother Ismail and his uncle Shaikh Murtada Al Yasin. He then moved with his brother Ismail to Najaf, receiving his *hawza* teaching first with Shaikh Muhammad Taqi al-Jawahiri, Shaikh Abbas al-Rumaithi and Sayyed Baqir al-Shakhs. Al-Sadr spent more than ten years in *Bahth al-Kharij*'s lessons with his master Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, under which he showed not only enthusiasm and devotion for learning, but also great argumentative skills with a genius intellect to absorb very complicated lessons.[424] He also showed an avid interest in philosophy and logic, which extended to the hard sciences (physics, chemistry and economics). During this period, it is said, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr rejected an offer made by Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, his uncle (who was the Iraqi Premier in 1948 and spokesperson of the Iraqi Parliament) who promised him a career in the Iraqi political services, indicating his life devotion for religious career rather than an earthly occupation.[425] Indeed, al-Sadr's personal background, religious upbringing and political developments that surrounded him participated in defining his future ambitions as a religious scholar immersed with real societal concerns for the Shi'a community.

Jama'at al-'ulama had received a true salutation by Qasim who gave the society a rare chance to broadcast its message through Baghdad Radio. As such, the society first adopted a pragmatic approach praising Qasim for his leadership characteristics and calling him *Naseer al-Islam* (partisan of Islam), in clear converse to the Communists,

[424] Al-Nu'mani, M R, ibid, vol,1, pp.47-67; al-Hussaini, M, al-Imam Al-Sadr, Seerah Thatayya, in (43-110) in (group of editors), *Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, Derasat fi Hayatihe wa Fikreh*, Beirut, 1996.

[425] Al-Hakim, M B, al-Shaheed Al-Sadr, Malamih min al-Seerah al-Dhatayya, *Shoon Islamayya*, No.8-9, p.14.

who used to refer to Qasim *Naseer al-Salam* (partisan of peace).[426] Thus, in addition to writings and public activities, it became possible now for the group to convey its ideas to a wide audience. Again, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr who was assigned with the editorial writing duties for the group was to emerge as the most active religious figure during these years.

Responding to these apparent anti-Communist activities, however, Iraqi Communists deemed both religious ‘*ulama* (Shi'i, Sunni) and nationalists as the principal threats to the Republic that should be crushed and suppressed. Celebrating the first anniversary of the Revolution, Talib al-Haidari, a Communist poet, called Qasim (the lion) to eliminate both *‘Afaliqat* (Ba'th followers of Michal ‘Aflaq) and *raja'ayeen* (reactionaries, alluding to religious *‘ulama*) who still adhered to old convictions. Muhammad Salih Bahr-ul‘Ulum urged Qasim (the beloved of millions) to launch his offensive attack against (evil heads).[427]

Fighting their enemy with the same weapon and responding in particular to *Jama'at al-‘Ulama*, the Iraqi Communists founded *Rijal al-Din al-Ihrar* (Liberal Religious Men) as a counter religious group, consisting of some junior ‘*ulama* and tribal Shaikhs in Najaf. *Jama'at al-'ulama* came to puplic soon after issuing the first statement on 23 *Jamadi al-Awal* 1378/1959. *Rijal al-Din al-Ihrar* vehemently responded, attacking both nationalists and *Jama'at al-‘Ulama*, who worked together, according to *Rijal al-Din al-Ihrar*.[428] As a Communist sponsored society, *Rijal al-Dinal-Ihrar* clashed with both nationalists and Shi'i activists over ideological, political and social concepts, defending the views of the ICP and condemning other rival groups. Communists, for instance, responded to nationalist and religious campaign against al-Jawahiri and other Communists sympathizers by similar attacks leveled at nationalist and religious

[426] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamayya*, *Haqaeq wa Watheaq*, Damuscus, 1999, p.101.
[427] *Al-Ma'lam al-Jadeed*, No.6-7, June-July, 1959.p.137; *Aqbas al-Thawra*, Baghdad-1959.p.6.
[428] Sheer, ‘Ali, R, *Nifaq al-Rifaq*, Najaf, 1959, p.14 & 26, 45-47.

figures.[429] Mahdi Matar, a religious Shaikh, poet and lecturer, went even further to attack Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim for his apathetic attitude towards Communists. It is reported that Sayyed al-Hakim decreed a *fatwa* against Matar, prohibiting listening to his lectures and sermons.[430] Even more, some *mumins* and *riwadeed* sympathetic to the Communist cause oftentimes used to address their audience to defend 'Communists who stand alone for realizing perfectly Imam 'Ali's ideals and to attack their reactionary, wealthy and aristocratic adversaries who simply defend the status quo.[431] Al-Hakim also criticized Sayyed Jabir Agaei as the latter was suspected of being a sympathizer to Communists, who strives- according to Agaei to interpret Imam Hussain's cause according to their revolutionary views and ideas.[432] Agaei, who was a sharp critic of 'reactionary and feudal religious men', was denounced for utilizing *Ashura* ceremonies to portray Imam Hussain as the highest symbol of a just Imam who sacrificed his life to defend the oppressed people in the face of unjust authorities. Although Agaei reiterated the same theme espoused by orthodox Shi'a preachers, he nevertheless was trying to bring this idea close to the contemporary political scene, linking ordinary oppressed people (who almost all supported Communism in Iraq) and their new leaders (the ICP).

It was clear, that *Jama'at al-'Ulama*'s activities were religiously motivated and far from organized political work, albeit new to Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf. It is true that these activities aimed at countering Communism to contain its destructive effects, however the '*ulama* who engaged in this function were far from being political activists. These

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[429] Sheer, 'Ali, R, *Bitanat Hassan al-Rigaa*, Najaf-1960, pp.24-38.
[430] An interview with Al-Momin, H, Najaf.20/12/2005; an interview with Abu Saba al-Basri. London-08/03/2010.
[431] Al-Momin, H, Najaf, 20/12/2005; an interview with Abu Saba al-Basri, London-08/03/2010.
[432] An interview with Abu Saba al-Basri, London-08/03/2010; Mudhar Shubar, London 15/10/2009; personal sources. Shi'i writers opt to avoid discussing controversial issues and sometimes even negate any account that reports the conflict between Agaei, for example and Sayyed al-Hakim. See for example, Hassan, S, D, *Ma'jam al-Khutabae*, Beirut-1996, vol, 2, pp.148-50.

‘ulama, in fact, did not make a break with their traditional view, that is executing *al-Takleef al-Shara’i* (religious duty) and for specific tasks without considering going further to participate in political action. For this reason, nationalists and particularly Ba’thists opted to work with its members in the hope of responding to the Communist threat. Ba’thists, however, became more concerned with a new current that came to the surface among the Shi’a community; that is the Da’wa Party. Those new missionary activists carried out the responsibility of defending Shi’a political representation and identity in accordance with modern political consciousness.

The formation of the Da’wa and the Ba’th challenge

If Communism’s powerful rise in Iraq antagonized Arab nationalists due to political calculations, both Sunni and Shi’i *‘ulama* felt their religious beliefs severly threatened by this secular ideology. Indeed, nationalist parties were mainly vying for power, whereas Shi’i ‘*ulama* in particular were looking to confront this secular and atheist challenge, which successfully penetrated their own communities; therefore were more concerned with protecting their social and religious values. This differentiation, however, was set aside for a while, and both trends came together to stand up against their perceived common threat.

While confronting Communists, nationalists in Najaf were alarmed by the emergence of new political trend amongst Shi’i *‘ulama*. This group came to be later known as *Hizb al-Dawa al-Islamayya* (the Islamic call Party). Consequently, Ba’thists who had pursued good relations with *Jama’at al-’ulama* went through a turbulent course with the Da’wa Party. It is important here to differentiate between two trends among Najaf’s *‘ulama*: the senior group or what has come to be known *Jama’at al-‘Ulama* from the new Shi’i political activists of *Hizb al-Dawa al-Islamayya*. Putting this caveat in mind is significant in order to better understand later developments.

Historians of the Da'wa Party lay emphasis on 1957 as the year of the group's birth. The year 1958, however, seems more accurate though earlier contacts, meetings and activities had certainly occurred.[433] Probably, the idea behind the Party was first reviewed among a group of junior *hawza* students and some active individuals in Najaf against the current political situation in Iraq prior and post the 1958 Revolution. What distinguished this group, however, was that most if not all the founding members were heavily influenced by Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar and his reformative approach that was introduced at his *madaris* or College in Najaf. In addition to the political, social and religious ideas of Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita that were circulated and reiterated amongst the founding group. In fact, Kashif al-Ghita, who will be recalled and celebrated later by the Da'wa Party, is the key to understanding the Shi'a political movement more than any other Shi'i figure.[434] Kashif al-Ghita, in effect, represented one of the most politicized *mujtahids* in Shi'i history throughout 1920s up until his demise in 1954, giving an exceptional and glaring contrast to the dominant conservative current in both Iraq and Iran.[435] Combining political and religious roles, Kashif al-Ghita was a staunch opponent of Communism, who tried to present a new formula resting on two pillars: Arabism and Islam.[436] Kashif al-Ghita, however, did not shy of defending Shi'i people, calling for giving them fair share in making Iraqi politics. Examining the Iraqi Shi'i movement in the light of Kashif al-Ghita's thesis, on the other hand, attests to the fact that this movement was a product of local Iraqi soil rather than of external influences.[437] It is worth stressing here that the Daw'a was born within the Arab non-

[433] For the Da'wa point of view see, Shubar, H, *Al-'Amal al-Hazbi fi al-Iraq 1908-1958*, Beirut-1989, pp.255-6; al-Momin, 'A, ibid, p.32. For a different view, see al-Khirsan, S, ibid, p.63.
[434] Al-'Askari, S, 'al-Harakat al-Islamayya al-Ma'asera fi al-Iraq…al-Bidayat', *Al-Fikr al-Jadeed*, No,4,1992,pp.221-248; al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.41-2; Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, vol, 1, p, 82, note.2.
[435] See chapter 3.
[436] Nafi, B, M, Arabism*, Islam and the Palestinian Question 1908-1941, A Political History*. Ithaca Press, UK, 1998, p.217.
[437] Early studies that dealt with the Iraqi Shi'i movement attempted to link it to the Iranian Revolution, paying no attention to its historical and political context in Iraq. See for example,

traditional *hawza*, deeply influenced by both al-Mudhafar and Kashif al-Ghita. As we shall see, both Iraqi nationalists and the Persian ‘*ulama* targeted the Da’wa members with sundry and conflicted accusations. In contrast to *Jama’at al-‘Ulama*, where membership was confined to senior Shi’i scholars, the Da’wa welcomed religious *‘ulama*, lay men, merchants and students. No less important to note is that members of the Da’wa (at this early stage) were almost all from Arab families espousing explicit political aspirations in stark contradiction to the members of *Jama’at al-‘Ulama*, who confined themselves to religious duties.

Despite the fact that few members of the Da’wa have already been active within *Jama’at al-’Ulama* (al-Sadr, Mahdi al-Hakim and Muhammad Hussain Fadhululah) to name few, it is still important to emphasize that all of the religious members of the Da’wa were still in junior ranks. Not surprisingly, religious scholars and leaders represent the masterminds behind Islamist movements both Sunni and Shi’a, with very noticed and exceptional roles played by Shi’i ‘*ulama* within the Da’wa Party. In the Da’wa example, the men who stood behind the Da’wa Party and agreed upon its idea were Talib al-Rifa’ai, Mahdi al-Hakim in addition to Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim who all shared a longing search for an organized group that could embrace their hopes. Junior in religious rank, these men, however, realized the need for the *marja’iyya*’s support as, no successful outcome would come out without its sponsorship. This group therefore, accosted Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who had already established a good name within the *hawza*, though he was not a *marja’i* at this stage.[438]At this phase, religious ‘*ulama* constituted more than a half of the Party’s founding group due to many religious and social reasons. The other half of the group, however, included the most active

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Marr, P, *Shi’i Fundamentalism in Iraq: A Test Case*, University of Tennessee, 1985, introduction & p.1.; Batatu, H, Iraq’s Underground Shi’a Movements: Characteristics, Causes and Prospects, *MEJ*,vol,35, No.4, Autuman-1981, pp.578-94; idem, Shi’i Organization in Iraq: Al-Da’wah al-Islamiyah and al-Mujahidin, in pp,179-200. (editors) Cole, J & Keddie, N, *Shi’ism and Social Protest*, Yale University Press.

[438] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb al-Da’wa al-Islamayya*, ibid, pp.49-51.

youth, who were pivotal to the Party, playing crucial roles in disseminating and popularizing its message.

The civilian group consisted of Muhammad Sadiq al-Qamousi, Muhammad Salih al-Adib, Hasan Shubar and most importantly ‘Abdul Sahib al-Dekhil or Abu ‘Isam al-Dekhil. The importance of this group is that it has already exhibited a keen interest in setting such a political entity, forming *al-Hazib al-Ja’fari* (the Ja’fari Party) in 1952.[439] However, owing to varying social and religious concerns, this short-lived experience came to its unsuccessful fate like early similar attempts, which lacked a real support from the Shi’a institutions; namely the *marja’iyya*. Of this group stands Abu ‘Isam al-Dekhil who probably deserves special attention as he worked hard during this early stage for building the Da’wa.[440] Al-Dekhil, a *hawza* student who earned no religious rank, belongs to an Arab Najafi family from the ‘Iniza tribe. He received his education at *Muntada al-Nashr* School (founded by al-Mudhafar), the fact that explains al-Mudhafar’s impact on him. Actually, two interrelated things may have contributed in formulating al-Dekhil outlook: his being influenced by al-Mudhafar and his reformative project, and his daily contacts with Najafi Communists. As noted, al-Mudhafar’s reformative approach left its mark on almost all active Shi’i ‘*ulama* either through contact with him personally or graduation from his *madrasa*. Also, important to note is the fact that al-Dekhil lived in al-‘Amarah Quarter, which was dubbed as a Communist den in the Holy city.[441] Perhaps, both his modern religious learning and his confrontations with Communism can be regarded as motivations that pushed al-Dekhil to think seriously about forming a political group, which could stand for or bring about an Islamic alternative. Al-Dekhil, who worked as a merchant, was not only the main

[439] Shubar, H, ibid, p.255; al-Khirsan, S, ibid, p.37.
[440] Jabar, F, *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*, ibid, pp.100-1
[441] For more details about Najaf’s Four Quarters, see chapter 2.

fundraiser of the group (he was a trustee for many other merchants and an agent for some *'ulama*) but also an influential figure amongst youth and students.[442]

Al-Sadr and the Da'wa

Although al-Sadr was not the founder of the Party, he became its *de facto* spiritual leader by virtue of his great intellectual caliber. Al-Sadr, who was in his mid twenties, played an immense role in setting, organizing and disseminating the message of the nascent party. Having studied the political writings and literature of other parties (Marxist, nationalists and the Muslim Brotherhood), al-Sadr coined the main concepts and principles for the proposed party. In this early phase (known as *al-Usus* or the Foundations), al-Sadr reflected a mix of varied influences with Sunni, nationalist and even Marxist ideas. For example, al-Sadr stresses in *al-Usus* the importance of *Sharia's* political and economic concerns of alongide its morals and social agenda. Not surprising, the Da'wa party's early theoretical platform showed an eclectic approach, reflecting a mix of influences of contemporary main stream parties like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbu al-Tahrir, Marxist and even nationalist groupings.

According to al-Sadr, there are two kinds of rule: 'rule of Islam and the rule of *al-Kufir wal Jahiliyya* (infidelity and ignorance). As long as ruling stands on a non-Islamic base, then it is the rule of infidelity and ignorance even when the governor is Muslim, practicing the Islamic (*'Ibadat*) duties… It is incumbent upon the Muslims to demolish this state and replace it with an Islamic one'.[443] With respect to the form of government, al-Sadr adopted the call to implement the *Shura* theory (consultation). Al-Sadr states that *Shura* is permissible therefore, the *Umma* (the whole Islamic nation) is permitted to

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[442] About al-Dekhil, see 'Abdul Karim, F, *'Abdul Sahib al-Dekhil, Seerat Qaed wa Tarikh Marhalat*, Beirut-2001.pp.15-46; al-Khirsan, ibid, pp.45-57 &121. The same is true with regard to Muhammad Sadiq al-Qamousi. For more details about his life, see al-Khaqani, 'A, *Shua'rae al-Ghari*, ibid, vol, 9, pp.232-249.

[443] Al-Shami, H, *Al-Marja'ayya al-Dinayya, min al-That ala al-Mouasasah*, London-1999.p.498.For al-Moudoodi's ideas, seep *Nadharayat al-Islam wa Hadyouh fi al-Sayasah wal Qanoon wal Dastoor*, Damascus-1967. See about *al-Hakimayya's* idea, pp.32-3 & 44-5, about the *Shurra's* idea, pp.57-60, about *al-Inqlab al-Islami*, pp.82-7.

install a government that executes its duties in implementing *al-Ahkam al-Sharaa'yya* (legal orders)'.[444]

Al-Sadr, however, criticizes the Islamist reformative movements, which seem content with mere preaching. Negating this approach, he calls for combining an *Inqilabi* tactic (radical or revolutionary method) with a gradual change, where every step prepares the ground for the next one until transforming the whole *umma* into a thorough Islamic life.[445] Even if, no reference was made to any Sunni writings, al-Sadr and surely other Shi'i activists seem to have been deeply influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, the earliest Islamic group that formed in Egypt in 1928. Al-Sadr, Khomeini and many other Shi'i activists, probably found their early political guidance in the writings of Hassan al-Bana the founder of the Brotherhood, Qutub, al-Moudoodi, Muhammad al-Ghazali and the like, who maintained the need for reviving the political aspects within Islam.[446] There is no doubt that Al-Sadr's reference to the *Shura* idea, the idea that seems alien and even unacceptable among Shi'i circles, reveals his exposure to Sunni political literature of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbu al-Tahreer.

Hizbu al-Tahrir, in particular, has constituted another clear Sunni catalyst for the Da'wa activists. In fact, few members of the Da'wa joined the erstwhile Hizbu al-Tahrir in the early 1950s with the hope of bringing Islamic solutions into life. Established first in Jordan and Palestine in 1952, Hizbu al-Tahrir soon became active in Iraqi universities in Baghdad in the mid 1950s.[447] Active Shi'i students, who were unsatisfied with both Communist and nationalist ideologies, longed for a new Islamic option that could realize their aspirations. Muhammad Hadi al-Sabaiti (engineer), Jabir 'Ata (doctor), Shaikh 'Arif al-Basri (religious Shaikh) are just a few names of many other Shi'i

[444] Al-Shami, ibid, p.504.
[445] Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamayya, *Thaqafat al-Da'wa al-Islamayya, al-Qism al-Tandhimi*,vol, 1, pp.30-3.
[446] Nasr, V, *the Shi'i Revival. How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, p.117.
[447] About Hizbu al-Tahreer, see for example, Commins, D, Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani and the Islamic Liberation Party, *MW*, vol, LXXXI, Nos, 3-4, 1991, pp.194-211.

activists, who desperately sought an Islamic alternative. Jabir ‘Ata is a good example of those Shi’a activists who were in quest for interpreting their ideological motivation, political aspirations and most importantly reserving their distinct religious identity. ‘Ata was an active member within the Istiqlal party in Najaf then he joined Hizbu al-Tahrir before abandoning the latter apparently for religious reasons to join the Da’wa.[448] Shi’a activists showed no interest in the Muslim Brotherhood, because this movement has been dubbed an exclusive Sunni club. Later on, the whole Shi’a group deserted Hizbu al-Tahrir for the same reason soon after the publication of Nabhani’s book *al-Khilafa al-Islamayya* (The Islamic Caliphate), which adopted the orthodox Sunni arguments regarding the theory of Imamat in Islam. As will be noticed later, the Sunni mark within the Shi’i movement has been a problematic issue and remained so for many religious, social and political considerations.[449]

The Da’wa organization, on the other hand, had followed a clandestine structure in line with both the ICP and the Ba’th. This structure has been popular among Marxist and Communist movements and copied by the Da’wa due to political and religious concerns.[450] Admittedly, political concerns had been hitherto relatively low and incomparable to the religious and social pressures that were directed particularly by *hawza* circles in Najaf. This is to say that joining or forming a political party by Shi’i religious men had been an awkward issue and a point of conflicts, debates and criticisms, bringing the validity of orthodox traditional Shi’i principles concerning politics into question. This issue has been (and still) remains unsettled, and had raised tensions not only between the Da’wa and Sayyed al-Hakim but also within the whole Shi’a community for many years to come.

Al-Sadr’s central role further proved in 1959, when he published *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy), the work that was designed to introduce an Islamic response to Marxist

[448] See Shukar, K, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, ibid, p.66.
[449] Al-Qazwini, J, *‘Izul-l- Din al-Jaza’eri,* ibid, pp.89-92.
[450] Jabar, F, ibid, pp.78-9.

and other Western doctrines. Instead of attacking 'Western illusions' as many of his predecessors did before, al-Sadr attemped to show that Islamic system is still a vigorous idea, doctrine and a hope at the hearts of Muslims, contrary to Communism, which represents a bare idea with no thorough experience.[451]

This followed by *Iqtisaduna* (Our Economy, 1959), the other pole of a wider ambitious project designed by al-Sadr.[452] In *Iqtisaduna*, al-Sadr endeavors to treat both Marxist and capitalist economic systems, criticizing them for their narrow view of human beings.[453]Al-Sadr aspiring language does not overlook the special lure of Communists thought among Muslim people (especially intellectuals), who were totally attracted to its charming philosophical argument. Thus, al-Sadr who addresses all Muslims with a universal tone rather than confining his message to Shi'is, delves in a deep philosophical argument, supported by comparisons and deductions.[454] No doubt, these two works and other subsequent writings have spread al-Sadr's reputation beyond the Da'wa fans, confirming his capabilities as one of the most learned scholars, authors and jurists.

The originality of al-Sadr's writings and activities lie in the fact that it made a complete break with the Shi'a dominant current. Thanks to al-Sadr, Shi'a Islam had now been revitalized from a spiritual and juridical guidance dealing only with moot issues, to a thorough political, economic, social and religious system suited to compete with other secular ideologies. Unlike the dominant trend among the Shi'a seminary, al-Sadr propounded an alternative pathway that could replace both Marxist and capitalist

[451] Al-Sadr, M B, *Falsafatuna*.Dar al-Ta'ruf, Beirut-1989, pp.11-47.
[452] Al-Sadr's original intention was to publish another book entitled *Mujtama'ana* (Our Society). It is said that Al-Sadr wrote this book, but for some unknown reason he did not publish it especially after quitting the Da'wa.
[453] *Iqtisaduna*, Dar al-Ta'ruf, Beirut, 1987, pp.15-23.
[454] Malat, S, Religious militancy in contemporary Iraq: Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr and the Sunni-Shia paradigm, *TWQ*, vol, 10, No, 2, April 1988, pp.699-730. For more details about Al-Sadr's life and works, see 'Aziz, T M, *The Islamic Political Theory of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr of Iraq*. (Dissertation, The University of Utah-1991).

trends.[455] No less important, al-Sadr's adventure had opened a new route for Shi'i *'ulama* to engage, for the first time, in religio-political discourse. A new generation of Shi'i '*ulama* had been born out of al-Sadr's intellectual adventure, addressing new priorities, concerns and new sets of theoretical and practical affairs.[456] Tackling daily issues according to religious law had developed into a major question within Shi'a seminaries, giving rise to two divergent schools concerning *'ulama's* role: the '*ulama* who concern themselves only with religious knowledge (*fiqh* and *'usul al-fiqh*) and the other group who now consider politics as a vital part of their responsibility. This debate also seriously affected the position of the *marja'i al-taqlid* and the way of reorganization, as religious knowledge was no longer the sole criteria for chosing the most learned jurist, but a jurist's attachment to the Shi'a community also started playing a major role.[457]

Al-Sadr, *Jama'at al-'Ulama* and the Ba'th

Surprisingly enough, al-Sadr's political writings and activities first provoked the concerns of Ba'thists not the Communists. This was also compounded by similar worries from the conservative current within the Shi'a seminaries in Najaf. While Ba'thists considered al-Sadr a new rival for their political position in the city itself, as he worked hard to attract young Shi'is into the Da'wa, some Shi'i '*ulama* criticized al-Sadr merely for adopting such political activism within the *hawza*. As such, the

[455] Batatu seems to have been underestimating the role of al-Sadr in forging Islamic and more precisely the Shi'a reformist trend. See Batatu, Iraq's Underground Shi'a Movements: Characteristics, Causes and Prospects, ibid, pp.578-94; idem, Shi'i Organization in Iraq: Al-Da'wah al-Islamiyah and al-Mujahidin, ibid.

[456] Shaikh 'Abdul Hadi al-Fadhli wrote *Mushkalat al-Faqr* (The Problem of Poverty), Shaikh Muhammadal-Gharawi, *al-Fuqara tahta Dhil al-Rasmalayya wa al-Marxayya wal Islam* (Poor People under Capitalism, Marxism and Islam) and Muhammad Mahdi al-Asifi, *al-Nidham al-Mali wa Tadawel al-Tharwa fi al-Islam* (Financial System and Exchanging Wealth in Islam).

[457] This trend developed first with al-Sadr then with Imam Khomeini and currently with Fadhlulah, Khamenei and Hezbollah. See Aziz, T, Fadhlallah and the Remaking of the *Marja 'iya*, pp.205-15, in, (editor) Walbridge, L.S, The *Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, Oxford University Press, USA -2001.

Ba'thists who kept close connections with *Jama'at al-'Ulama* through family networks revealed their misgivings over the Da'wa activities and particularly al-Sadr's role in the party. Apparently, Ba'thists took advantage of their familial connections in *Jama'at al-'Ulama* to pass their concerns.[458]

Actually, a good number of the ten *mujtahids* in the group had been either connected personally or real sympathizers of the Ba'th Party. Of the first group, there were two members who belong to the Al Shaikh Radi family; Muhammad Tahir Al Shaikh Radi and Muhammad Jawad Al Shaikh Radi, with good grounds to assume common cooperation between the group and the Ba'th through, Muhsin Al Shaikh Radi, then a Command member within the Ba'th Party. With regard to the second group, it is possible to describe both Muhammad Taqi Bahr-ul al-'Ulum and Musa Bahr-ul al-'Ulum as pro- nationalists. Thus, while, Ba'thists had good contacts with this group, expressing definite support for its anti-Communist activities, they spearheaded a harsh attack against al-Sadr for being politically active within a religious party. Around July 1960, Hussain al-Safi, a Najafi Ba'thi who belonged to a distinguished Arab *Sadah* family, attacked al-Sadr, criticizing him for conducting such political activities.[459] This indictment, we should note, is based on and emanated from the orthodox point of view that disavows any political action during the Greater Occultation and the absence of *al-Imam al-Ghaeb* (the Hidden Imam).[460] As stated earlier, the apolitical current became the dominant trend within Najafi seminaries to the extent that any political engagement on the part of '*ulama* mounted to aberration.

Thus, the Ba'th-led campaign against al-Sadr echoed by some *'ulama*, though maintained for quite different reasons. Constituting the bulk of the conservative apolitical trend within the Najafi *hawza*, many Persian '*ulama* found themselves

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[458] See Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, ibid, vol, 1.p.205.
[459] Al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.113-4; Jabar, F, ibid, p, 119; Aziz, T, *the Role of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980*, ibid, p.210.
[460] See Chapter 2.

disturbed by al-Sadr's political views that targeted the Shah of Iran. Some of these *'ulama*, as we shall later see, were suspected to have been linked to the Shah who supported them financially. It seems, however, that the concerns over al-Sadr's political activities perhaps reflected the overwhelming traditional apolitical trend within Najafi *hawza* rather than directed towards al-Sadr himself.

It is equally important to stress that the apolitical or quietist trend had been more visible among the Persian '*ulama* than their Arab counterpart had. Despite the fact that aloofness and non-intervention in politics prevailed among Najafi *'ulama*, Iraqi *mujtahids* appeared more willing to express the need if not the necessity of political engagement in order to alter what they considered biased and sectarian political process in Iraq. In fact, aloofness and non-intervention in politics has been more discernible among the Persian '*ulama* residing in the Holy Cities since the mid-1920s due to political, historical and social considerations. The Persian '*ulama* pursued apolitical careers simply to keep away of social worries (their national status) and to avoid any political concerns. This approach not only left a far-reaching impact upon Shi'i '*ulama* but also hardened as the official doctrine within the Najafi *hawza*. Also, important to notice is that while Arab *mujtahids* in Najaf oftentimes continued exercising a political role, the main trend among their Persian counterparts refrained from taking political action inside Iran. This again accounted by the fact that the Iraqi Sunni elite hold political power in Baghdad in contrast to the nominally Shi'a government in Iran, where the Iranian '*ulama* had been well contained since the Safavid era; hence the marginal space left to Iraqi Shi'is was a good reason for their '*ulama* to assume the opposition role. For example, Murtada Al Yasin, who was the head of *Jama'at al-'Ulama* and the uncle of al-Sadr, exhibited in the very early stage, his disappointment with the Sunni sectarian policies targeting Shi'is. Al Yasin wrote in 1945, that 'Sunnis have utilized their extensive freedom to disregard the Shi'is, humiliating them and encouraging Sunni

followers to attack the Shi'is and to spill their blood. Thus, Sunnis continued to violate the dignity of Shi'is by spreading lies and slurs. Al Yasin furiously warns Sunnis of such mistreatment directed towards Shi'is, stating that 'we want to inform them to stop attacks against the Shi'is in order to appease the Shi'is, otherwise the Shi'is shall find themselves obliged to organize their defensive lines wherever they find Sunni people insult them'.[461] It is clear that Al Yasin was expressing his anger over the Sunni sectarian policies, as well as, his hope to revise the unjust political system in Iraq.

Realizing his position at stake due to the rumors and slurs that beset him, al-Sadr consequently decided to quit political activities with the Da'wa especially after an injunction received from al-Hakim himself, and some of the Da'wa leaders. Probably, this decision reached by al-Sadr was after long personal uncertainty.[462] It is not clear whether al-Sadr made this move, as a temporary tactic to avoid troubles within *hawza* or it was a genuine and final decision to dedicate completely to the *marja'iyya*. Subsequent developments, however, conforms the former conclusion, as al-Sadr himself did not entirely terminate his political activities.

This decision, however, opened the way for the non-religious wing in the Da'wa to take the leading role within the Party, though religious '*ulama* would still constitute a good majority of its leadership. Of the influential figures, Abu Hassan al-Sabaiti, will arise as the most active and devoted member. Notwithstanding, the leadership issue had been a heated and controversial one, dividing the Party itself and complicating its connection with the *marja'iyya*. Moreover, this issue remained unresolved within the Party for decades and kept the Party subject to discord and friction for many years to come. One reason behind this confusion stems from the fact that both the religious '*ulama* and lay educated cadre may had divergent views regarding the role of *faqih* (jurist). While '*ulama* saw in *mujtahid* or *marja'i al-taqlid* the highest authority according to the

[461] Al-Subaiti, A, *Tahta Rayat al-Haq*, Tehran,1945, p.p.3 & 9.
[462] Al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.113-122.

emulation principle in Shi'a Islam, lay men thought of consulting '*ulama* in religious matters, giving Party directives a superior position over political affairs. According to Jabar, this novel form of leadership makes a clear break with the traditional Shi'a hierarchy, 'which runs from God to the Prophet to the Imams and down to the *mujtahids*'.[463] As we shall see, the leadership issue remained a point of conflict and disagreement not only with Sayyed al-Hakim, but also with other rival Shi'a groups.

The first cells of the Da'wa concentrated mainly on the main religious centres (Najaf and Karbala) with few spots in Baghdad particularly in *al-Karadah al-Sharqayya* and in Basrah in the south of Iraq. These few dotted cells were in connection with Najaf through some active '*ulama* like Sayyed Murtada al-'Askari in Baghdad and Shaikh 'Arif al-Basri in Basrah. The Da'wa, no doubt, benefited from religious and social activities that were carried out by *Jama'at al-'Ulama* especially those ordered by Sayyed al-Hakim himself. Al-Hakim who gave his orders to construct new mosques and libraries throughout Iraqi cities provided these new centres with religious *Shaikhs* to deliver their services to people here and there.[464] These centres had been instrumental in reviving Shi'a religious traditions, hence attracting supporters to the Da'wa though no formal link was established between the *marja'iyya* in Najaf and the Party. Despite its apparent precarious mode, relations between the *marja'iyya* in Najaf and the Party had been in motion. It is even true to argue that the Da'wa would not achieve its initial success without this informal association with the *marja'iyya* in Najaf.

Unlike all other Iraqi parties and movements, which looked to its command in Baghdad, the Da'wa alone had links with its spiritual and political supreme leadership in Najaf. Najaf and Baghdad, however, remained the Da'wa's main centres until the mid 1960s, when Basrah emerged as one of the most active districts within the Shi'a community. While Najaf represents the main link and symbol, Baghdad in effect played

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[463] Jabar, F, ibid, p.80.
[464] Anon (al-Hilaw, 'A), al-*Harakat al-Islamayya fi al-'Iraq*, ibid, pp.20-33; Jabar, F, ibid, p.80.

a crucial role in extending Party membership. This was, mainly, because Iraqi universities in Baghdad have been the main point of contact, where *al-Dua'at* (missionaries) could meet their Shi'i fellows from other parts of Iraq. By 1963, more than 400 members joined the Party with a good percentage of sciences students like medicine and engineering.[465]

During this early phase, however, the Da'wa did not even succeed in expanding its activities to the other close cities and towns in the Middle Euphrates (Diwanayya, Samawa and Hilla) and to the south (Nassirayya, 'Amara and Kut). This was due mainly to the meager influence that was exercised by Najaf's '*ulama* among their Shi'i faithful in the south, the fact that rendered good service to secular movements especially the ICP, which swept main regions like Nassirayya.[466]

Najaf's *'ulama*, Arab nationalists and the ICP

From the outset, al-Hakim's stance towards the Da'wa seems to have been unsettled and changeable. It is striking that whereas al-Hakim has showed contrasting reactions towards the Da'wa, he supported the Sunni Islamic Party in its demand to claim authorization.[467] This came in 1960 when Qasim attempted to bring some change into Iraqi political life and most importantly to limit the role of the ICP through issuing the law of organizing political parties. The Islamic Party took this opportunity to push for obtaining the government's endorsement, and this was eventually realized thanks to the support of al-Hakim himself.[468] From its inception, the Islamic Party displayed a clear and unmistakable message: confronting Communism, 'forming a political party that

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[465] See al-Khirsan, S, p.128

[466] Even more than the Middle Euphrates, the South was a communist fortress, where the ICP found its best soil to grow. Nassirayya, for instance, has always dubbed the 'small Moscow' as the majority of its people were communist.

[467] Some researchers refer to the Islamic Party as 'formed by Iraqi Shi'as'. This confusion stems from the fact that the Party sponsored and backed by Sayyed al-Hakim. Qasim, in fact, showed great respect to al-Hakim, therefore, did not object his authorization for this Party. See Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'a*, Colorado-1992, p.36.

[468] Marr, P, *The Modern History of Iraq*, ibid, p.96. While both The Islamic Party and Hizb al-Tahreer sought government licence, the Da'wa was to keep secret. See Jabar, F, A, ibid, p.124 and compare with Tripp, C. ibid.p.154.

carry out the task of protecting youth and the *Umma* (nation) and to steer them to an Islamic pathway'.[469] The Party thus condemned Iraqi Communists for the 'atrocities that took place in Mosul and Kirkuk. 'Abdul Jabar al-Shaikhli, a founding member of the Islamic Party, attacked the 'atheist communist idea'. Atheism, materialism, and above all anti-Arab attitude became the main pretexts and grounds that were used by Islamic activists (Sunni and Shi'i alike), to criticize the ICP and most importantly a common reason that brought together Arab nationalists and Shi'i *'ulama*. Murtada Al Yasin, who had criticized Sunni domination over Shi'i majority, came to the view that Communism is the biggest threat that faces Muslims in Iraq now; and unsurprisingly, he was ready to fight these atheists under the command of 'Omar ibn al-Khatab (the second Caliph of the Four Rightly-Guided).[470] Other Shi'i activists vehemently condemned Communists for their anti-religious literature. Considering the strength of Communism in Iraq, Muhammad Rida al-Nouri called upon nationalists to 'consider the menacing situation', in an attempt to bring both nationalists and Shi'i activists together under one umbrella. Al-Nouri, who ascribes the lure of Communism to its anti-colonial tone, asserts however, that:

'The fate of Communism will be determined in Iraq as this land is the birthplace of religion and the centre of nationalism. It is impossible, he continues, to imagine that Iraqis will reject Islam for letting Communism in their land of Islam, the land of 'Ali and Hussain'.[471]

Nationalists also attacked the atheist attitude of the Iraqi Communists, denouncing their ideas over a woman's right to work, etc and stressing that Iraq 'will be the solid stone that will shatter the Communists' waves'.[472]

Shi'a *'ulama*, Arabism and the Ba'th

[469] *Nashrat al-Hizb al-Islami al-Iraqi*, Baghdad,1960, pp.5-6.
[470] Al-Rufa'ai, 'A, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Dar al-Hikma, London-2008, p.43.
[471] Al-Nouri. Muhammad. R, *al-Shaua'yya Tunaqidh al-Din*, Najaf-1959, p.82, 88.
[472] Nukhbah min al-Shabab al-Arabi, *Khayanat al-Shaua'yya*.

Although incomparable to the strength of the ICP, the Ba'th Party, nonetheless, emerged as a very organized rival, relaying on its clandestine structure and benefited from its wide support to Arab causes (Egypt, Palestine, Algeria).[473] Headed by Fouad al-Rikabi, the Ba'th succeeded not only in penetrating the Shi'a areas but also in strengthening its position within the military. Indeed, the Ba'th made good use of the Arabism-Islam synthesis to attract even some junior '*ulama* to its membership.[474]

The new thesis inspired Arab Shi'a *'ulama*, who had been battered and alienated by the anti-religious and purely secular Communist creed. The Ba'th's association with Arabism and its clear emphasis upon Islam as an element within its ideology, explains to some extent the positive reception showed by Shi'i *'ulama* towards this nationalist group. In fact, the main reasons behind the appeal of the Ba'th had been its vague secular tone, 'its extensive organization, involving a secret network of branches … and second, a certain exclusiveness and insistence that party members are the only true custodians of Arab doctrine'.[475] During this phase, Shi'is comprised a majority within the Command of the Ba'th with almost doubles the number of their Sunni counterparts. Of nine members of the Command, there were 5 Shi'i members with only 3 Sunnis.[476]

Realizing its small public base, however, the Ba'th relied on good social networks, and tactics to face the ICP. Furthermore, the Ba'thists did not hesitate to use gangs or maneuvers against the Communists. In Baghdad and Mosul in particular, the Ba'th employed gangs to overcome the Communist's strength. In Najaf, Communists and nationalists had returned attacks and the ICP proved to have the upper hand in the city. Given the number of ICP supporters and its political leverage within the new state, the

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[473] An interview with al-Hilow, 'A (Najafi religious Sayyed, preacher and writer), London-10 /03/2002.

[474] Junior clerics from Iraq and the Arab Gulf states joined the Ba'th during this period such as Muhammad al-Hijri from Saudi Arabia, who was studying then at Najaf.

[475] FO 371/170160, Confidential, No.192, from the Canadian Ambassador, Cairo, UAR to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, Canada, (the Baath Party and the UAR), March 23, 1963.

[476] See Batatu, H, ibid, p.968, Table 52-1.

Communists in Najaf were capable of launching offence against the nationalists including members of the *Istiqlal* Party as well as religious '*ulama* who were suspected sympathizers of Arab nationalists. Several members of the *Istiqlal* Party were persecuted and attacked; hence, either fled to Baghdad or became exiled in Egypt like Sayyed Ahmad al-Haboobi and Shaikh Ahmad al-Jazaeri.[477]

Once again, the Ba'thists who recognized this disparity resorted to sensitive religious issues, benefiting from the sheer atheist material of ICP, aiming at bringing public support to their side as well as undermining the image of the enemy. In Baghdad, for example, Ba'thists insulted the Quran or Qasim's portraits in public demonstrations, claiming that 'only atheist Communists would dare to commit such criminal outrages'.[478]

In Najaf, more than any where, Ba'thists took advantage of social patronage and familial connections as an efficient instrument for protection and safety in the face of Communists, as most Ba'thists came from distinguished Arab families like Al Al-Sharqi and Al al-Shaikh Radi. Further, some of them who belonged to *Sadah* families like Al al-Safi, Al al-Rufa'ai, Abu Tabikh may have used their social status as leverage for defending their political ideology. Patronage networks, therefore, not only provided them with support and safety but also with moral and political stimulation. Najafi Ba'thi members and their sympathizers had also resorted to using the issue of ethnicity against their Communist rivals. Ba'thists in general and in particular in Najaf accused Communists of being non-Arab and specifically Persians. This allegation, in effect provided nationalists since the late of 1940s with a deadly weapon, used first against non-Muslim communists (Jews for instance).[479] This kind of debate demonstrated that

[477] Al-Ḥaboobi, A, *Ashkhas Kama 'Araftahum*, ibid, p.58; Shukar, K, ibid, pp.104-5.
[478] Al-'Alawi, H, *'Abdul Karim Qasim, Rouayat ba'da al-'Ishreen*, London-1983, pp.47-8.
[479] About the role of Iraqi minorities in the ICP, see Batatu, H, ibid. table 14-2.pp.416-21, table: 16-1.pp.450-1, table 19-1.pp.494-5 & table: 19-3.pp.520-1. Also see, Zubaida, S, 'Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics', in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958*, *The Old Social Classes Revisited*, pp.202-7.

political allegiance triumphed over shared sectarian belonging in particular in Shi'a areas. As the subsequent developments will show, same national belonging had taken a superior position when conflicted with religious identity.

It is worth noting that some Shi'i '*ulama* expressed or asserted sympathy towards nationalists probably to evade any confrontation with Arab nationalists. For example, some Persian '*ulama* recalled their 'pure Arab origin' as descendents of the great Arab Prophet Muhammad and his *Al Al-Bayt* family. 'Abdul Karim al-Zinjani (H.1304-1388) a Persian *mujtahid*, called for Arab unity, arguing that:

This unification is a very solid foundation for Islamic unity. Islamic unity seeks nothing than achieving the moral and intellectual hegemony for Arab element over other Muslim nations… Arab nationalism is not like other non-factual nationalities…it is a practical fact, endorsed by the throne of Allah'.[480] Displaying support for Arab nationalism, however, did not pass without a price, as al-Zinjani was subject to a failed assassination attempt by Communists.[481]

It is still important to note that a good number of Shi'i '*ulama* were neutral, showing no sympathy towards either nationalists or Communists. Notwithstanding the ideological battle between the atheist Communists and the supposed pro-Islam nationalists revealed the scope of political orientations among the *'ulama*. Consequently, Shi'i '*ulama* were divided by and large into two broad uneven groups; those who stood behind Communists, therefore became a target of nationalist propaganda that links Communism to non-Arab people, and those who advocated truly or outwardly nationalism at least to run away from the unescapable political confrontation and social concerns.

Thus, the allegations directed towards Communists as descendants of Persian origin, full of hatred for Arabs had to be taken within the context of political claims made by

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[480] *Safha min Rihlat al-Imam Al-Zinjani wa Khutabih*, Najaf-1947, p.356.
[481] Dann, U, *Iraq under Qasim*, ibid, p.145.

contested groups rather than a genuine assertion. This claim was to be reversed later by nationalists (Sunni) mainly against Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq especially after the collapse of relationship between the nationalist regime in Baghdad ('Arif) and Najaf. As we will see, this charge will be employed again, immediately after the 1963 takeover by the Sunni Ba'thists against their Shi'i partners and the whole Shi'a community in Iraq as an instrument to subvert the opponent.

Iraqi Communists undoubtedly displayed a discernible mockery towards religion and '*ulama* particularly during the first two years of the revolution. Communists, for example, encouraged publishing Marxist literature with clear atheist and anti-religious tone. Books and pamphlets circulated and distributed freely inside Najaf and other Iraqi cities with offensive titles such as *Ayna Allah* (Where is Allah?), *Aslu-l- 'Ale'alah* (The Origin of Family), *Allah fi Qafas al-Itiham* (Allah in the Trial's Dock).[482] Even more, the ICP seems to have underestimated the sensitivities of religious traditions and issues in a city like Najaf. In this regard, the ICP was disgraced, for instance, for sending uncovered women to demonstrate in the streets of the city.[483]

The anti-religious tendency intensified with the issuing of the controversial Personal Status Law by Qasim's government in December 1959. According to this Law, (article 3) a restriction was imposed on the right of polygamy, and 'men were forbidden to take a second wife without the authorization of a judge, and then only for a legitimate reason'.[484] A more controversial article, however, was (article 74), which granted women an equal right with men with regard to inheritance. No doubt, this Law aroused anger within the Shi'a institution and this coincided with the ICP escalating its pressures and attacks against Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf. Qasim's tolerant attitude towards Communist propaganda had offered many Shi'i '*ulama* a good excuse to totally break

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[482] Al-Khirsan, S, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadeeth*, *Al-Harakat al-Marxayya 1920-1990*, Beirut-2001, p.155.
[483] *Al-Iraq bayna al-Madhi*, p.549.
[484] Marr, P, ibid, p.100.

with the regime, and to take the nationalists' side. Yet, Arab political developments offered another good reason to stand against Qasim and Communism. In fact, Arab and regional political developments were to bear more pressure on Shi'i '*ulama* than domestic events did. This is true concerning the relations of the Shi'i *marja'iyya* with both Naser of Egypt and the Shah of Iran.

Najaf and Arab politics: Al-Hakim between Qasim and Naser

As indicated earlier, Naser seems to have been at the heart of Iraqi politics, dividing Iraqis broadly into two camps; those supporting him under the banner of Arab nationalism and those who defied him and advocated 'Iraq first'. Naser welcomed the 14 July Revolution as another established success of his revolutionary camp and a victory for the entire Arab cause. Once he received the news of the Iraqi Revolution, Naser broke a visit to Yugoslavia and went back to Damascus, where he announced his support for 'the brothers in Baghdad'. Naser further declared that 'we will carry the weapons with you'.[485] The first sign, to validate Naser's beliefs, was when he received, after only five days of the revolution, 'Abdul Salam 'Arif, the second–man-in command, to sign a mutual agreement with the United Arab Republic. According to this agreement, the two parties pledged to give full support for the 'Arab collective security pact and mutual defense in case of foreign aggression'.[486] The al-Azhar also welcomed the revolution in accordance with Naser's policy towards the new authority in Iraq. Since he came to power, Naser exploited the al-Azhar as a medium to back his domestic and external political interests. Naser tightened his grip on al-Azhar, through introducing two laws in 1958 and 1961 that included, among other things, more involvement in directing al-Azhar's role. For this reason, the al-Azhar, gave its full

[485] Azhar, vol, 30, No, 1, July 1958, p.105. See also Dawisha, A, *Arab Nationalism*, ibid, pp.210-1.
[486] Hofstadter, D, *Egypt and Naser, trials of an expanding revolution*, (3 vols), vol.2, 1957-66, New York, 1973, p.53.

support to Naser's social policies and his nationalization programs.[487] With regard to the Iraqi Revolution, the al-Azhar's magazine reported that: 'indeed this event (the Revolution), may be considered as one of the greatest events of this year. It is… as a new star has arisen in the crown of Arab nationalism. It is our hope… that a new star will follow another until the Arab unity will be achieved'.[488] In his letter to Qasim, 'Abdu al-Rahman Taj, the then Shaikh of the al-Azhar wrote: 'I welcome your noble national spirit and congratulate you with the result of this magnificent revolution'.[489]

Naser's 'Great Expectations', however, were to disappear soon. Unlike 'Arif, Qasim took a cautious attitude towards Naser's Arab ambitions. In fact, Qasim had been more concerned with Iraqi affairs and paid lip service to Naser's repeated calls to realize the dream of an immediate Arab unity. There is no doubt that Qasim's cautious attitude towards Naser came in consistence with the view of the ICP, especially after the increasing pressures put by Naser on their Communist counterpart, in Syria and Egypt. Most important, however, Qasim displayed his concerns over Naser's Arab policies specifically over Syria, which had been part of Iraq's political hegemony for the proceeding decades. During the monarchy era, Syria had always been close to Iraq and Syrians, and Iraqis often expressed their common aspiration to unite. While other Arab states showed indifferent attitude towards the Arab League meetings in Cairo in late 1949, Iraq and Syria 'both government and opposition element approved the idea of a collective security pact on the condition that it does not include provisions which would prevent eventual union between Syria and Iraq'.[490] Naser's reign over Syria coupled

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[487] About Naser's policy towards the Azhar, see Zeghal, M, Religion and Politics in Egypt: the Ulema of Al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State1952-1994, *IJMES*, 31, 1999, pp.371-399. Also, see Tamir Moustafa, Conflict and Cooperation between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt, *IJMES*, 32, 2000, pp.3-22.

[488] Azhar, vol, 30, No, 1, July 1958, p.19.

[489] Ibid, p.100; Azhar, vol, 30, No, 2, August 1958, pp.143-144.

[490] Confidential, USAIRA, Crocker, Baghdad, to CS at Washington DC, April 10, 1950; Confidential, USAIRA, Crocker, Baghdad, to CS at Washington DC, January 8, 1950; Confidential, USAIRA, Crocker, Baghdad, to CS at Washington DC, January 23, 1950; Kerr,

with his tough line against the Syrian Communist Party and his Secretary Khaled Bakdash, who was a close ally to the ICP, worsened rather than eased the tension between Naser and Qasim. The ICP, therefore, seems to have been at the centre of the Qasim-Naser feud, particularly after the success of the ICP in building a good relationship between the Soviets and Qasim. Consequently, Qasim emerged as a good and trustyworthy friend for the Soviet Union, which expressed concerns over Naser's policies towards Communists in Egypt and Syria.[491]

By the end of December 1958, Naser reached the conclusion that Qasim is better considered a foe rather than a friend, and Iraq is far from being assimilated as part of the United Arab Republic. Naser probably reached this point after the final divorce between Qasim and 'Arif; Qasim's measures against nationalists in the Iraqi government and finally the apparent Communist influence within the new Iraqi Republic. Naser stepped up his pressure first by denouncing Communists in Syria. This action brought forth a demonstration against Naser in Najaf organized by the 'Partisans of Peace' on 19 December 1958. This was followed by a 'regular weekly series, sometimes in towns where there had been a strong pan-Arab nationalist tradition'.[492]

M, H, *The Arab Cold War, Gamal Abd Al-Nasser and His Rivals.1958-1970* , Cairo-1997, p.24; Shikara, Ahmad, A R, , *Iraqi Politics 1921-1941*, ibid, pp.204-9.

[491] Naser, J, *Nahno wal Iraq wal Sha'yyoayya*, Beirut.p.60; Shalabi, 'A A, *al-'Alaqat al-Siyasayya bayna Misr wal Iraq 1951-1963*, p, 440; Marlow, J, *Arab Nationalism and British Imperialism, A Study in Power Politics*, London-1961, p.182.

[492] FO 371/140910, Confidential, Annex 1, the Revolt in Mosul, March 7-9.1959, British Embassy. Baghdad.

Naser then openly attacked Qasim for the first time after the failure of ‘Abdul Wahab al-Shawaf’s coup of March 1959 in Mosul. In response to the Iraqi government’s condemnation of this coup, Naser declared on 12 March that ‘the Shawaf revolt in Iraq was not inspired by a foreign power or by the United Arab Republic but was caused by Kassem’s effort to introduce ‘a Communist reign of terror in Iraq’.[493] As relations between Qasim and Naser rapidly deteriorated, Naser followed new tactics to shake Qasim’s regime.

Whereas the Iraqi Revolution brought together the ICP and nationalists groups for a while, it soon became clear that they are sailing in different directions. Unlike the ICP, which declared unconditional support to Qasim’s regime, the nationalists (Istiqlal and the Ba’th Party) had a different point of view. Surely Iraqi nationalists who owed a great deal of their success to Naser looked to him as a guiding example of Arab leadership and to Egypt as the becon of Arab nationalism. Although adversaries of Qasim and Communists composed a mix of religious, tribal and nationalist groups, nationalists notably the Ba’thists were certainly benefited the most as ‘the more the pro-communist trend developed, the more Iraqi moderates followed the pan-Arab nationalists in turning to Naser as the only leader who would save them’.[494] It is worth emphasizing that on the contrary to the Istiqlal, which was born and bred in the Iraqi soil, the Ba’th was born, brought and guided by the hands of Arab politics, by Michal ‘Aflaq and Naser as the main two masters of Arab nationalism. In addition, Cairo and Damascus, replaced Baghdad, to become the favourite destinations of Arab nationalists from the mid 1950s until the early 1970s.

The Qasim-Naser feud had also had its external implications. Certainly, the advance of the ICP had warned the Americans who were engaged in bloody strife over the whole

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[493] Hofstadter, D, *Egypt and Naser*, ibid, pp, 54-5; Naser, J, *Nahno wal Iraq wal Sha’yyoayya*, Beirut, p, 60.

[494] FO 371/140896, Confidential, No.9, Annual Report, 1958-Iraq, British Embassy, Baghdad, January 29, 1959.

region with the Soviets. Although Naser was a staunch opponent to the western presence and the Americans in particular, he appeared close to the latter as they both shared hatred for Qasim. Thus:

'On 17 February 1959, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) concluded that Qasim lacked the 'ability to stem the movement toward a Communist takeover'. The report doubt on Qasim himself being a Communist, but offered a bleak picture of continued Communist successes. It noted that, fortunately, the security services and Ministry of the Interior had remained in the hands of non-Communists. The aftermath of the failed Mosul revolt further aggravated Washington's concerns.[495]

Sharing the same concerns over the current political situation in Iraq, the American administration seemed ready to work together with the Egyptians in order to impede the danger of the rising Communists in Iraq. The Americans were in no doubt over 'the choice between Communism and Nasirism, and the latter seems to be the lesser of two evils'.[496]

Naser and 'Shi'a factor'

Given the fact that the Shi'is composed the majority of Iraqi people, it is probably that Naser realized the weight of the Shi'i '*ulama* at a very early stage. Naser might have come to this conclusion when he had witnessed the great influence of the Shi'i '*ulama* among their followers during the Suez Crisis in 1956 in the face of Nuri al-Sa'id's government.[497] Shi'i '*ulama* like Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, 'Abdul Karim al-Jazaeri, Muhsin al-Hakim, 'Abdul Hussain Sharaf-lu al-Din, to name just a few, sent letters and telegraphs, expressing their full support to Naser and Egypt.[498] As we shall see, Naser did not hesitate to bolster his relationship with Shi'i '*ulama* in both Iraq and

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[495] Barrett, R C, *The Greater Middle East and the Cold War. US Foreign Policy under Eisenhower and Kennedy*, I.B.Tauris-London-New York-2010, pp.113-4.
[496] Ibid, p.114.
[497] Naser was married to Teheya Kadhem, a Shi'i woman who came originally from the small Persian community, which lived mainly in Cairo and worked in business. See Saad, R, Labyrinths of the sect, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No, 817, 19-25 October 2006. (Accessed 10/11/2008).
[498] Al-Hassani, 'A A, 'Azmat al-Soa'yys wa Tatheeraha fi al-'Iraq', *Al-Mosem*, No, 9/10.pp.21-43; al-Hakim, Hassan, *al-Mufasal fi Tarikh al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, ibid, vol, 12, pp.355-7.

Iran. Shi'i '*ulama* and nationalists, on the other hand, have shared a common admiration for Egypt's pioneering role in Arabic intellectual life and Islamic reformation from the 19th century until recently. For this reason, Shi'i youths set their eyes on Egypt as the first destination to receive an education from 1930s onwards. The period between 1930s and 1970s had witnessed a considerable growth in the number of Iraqi Shi'a, who made Cairo rather than Tehran their favorite station.[499]

Add to this that Shi'i '*ulama* in general viewed the al-Azhar as a good and revered example for reforming religious educational institution and promoting its standards, the example that might be imitated by the *hawza* in Najaf.[500] In fact, Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar who founded (*Kulaiyat al-Fiqih*) the College of Law in 1958 was primarily influenced by the al-Azhar.[501] According to Shi'a*'ulama*, it was al-Azhar alone in the Sunni world that could stand as a match for Najaf's intellectual reputation. Thus, Shi'a '*ulama* seem to have expressed a sense of esteem with undisputable support for Naser's leadership during 1950s onwards.

Obviously, Naser started to pay good attention to the Shi'a factor as he was implicated with political developments in both Iraq and Iran. Naser therefore, presented his good will towards Shi'is as he considered the need to gather the support of his potential allies against his rivals: Qasim in Iraq and the Shah in Iran. For this end, Naser set out to put some injunctions and instructions aiming at improving his links with the Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq and Iran in order to bring pressures on both Qasim and the Shah. Firstly, Naser ousted Salafi scholars and writers who adopted anti-Shi'a views. Salafi figures like Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib and the like, with their fierce polemics against Shi'is were

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[499] See, Al-Khaqani, 'Ali, *Shua'rae al-Gharai*. Thought there are no exact and detailed numbers, al-Khaqani refers here and there to Najafies who studied in Cairo. Another significant indication is the number of poems written by Najafis about Egypt, see al-Mousawi, A.A, *Hirakata al-Shaker if al-Najaf*, ibid, pp.530-6.

[500] Brunner, R, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century. The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint*, Brill-2004, pp.48-50; al-Hakim, Hassan, ibid, pp.171-86.

[501] Nakash, Y, ibid, pp. 264-265.

silenced.[502] Then, in October 1958, Naser appointed Shaikh Muhmood Shaltut as a Rector of the al-Azhar. The appointment of Shaltut was undoubtedly a deliberate message specifically designed and directed to attract the hearts of the Shi'is in Iraq and Iran. Naser purposely chose Shaltut as the latter was well- known for his good efforts in rapprochement with the Shi'i circles.[503]

From the start, Shaltut suggested a new reformative program according to which the al-Azhar curricula incorporated the study of Zaidite and Twelver Shi'a *fiqh*. This step left an impressive impact upon Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq and Iran and was applauded as another illustration of Naser's good intentions towards the Shi'i people in general.

It was no accident that whereas Naser was enhancing his relations with both Shi'i '*ulama* and nationalist groups in Iraq, he continued his fierce attacks against both Qasim and the Communists. Disappointed by Qasim's unhealthy steps, Naser enjoined in December 1958 his men to organize a propaganda campaign against Qasim. Journalists such as Muhammad Hussain Haikal, Ihsan 'Abdul Qadoos, Mustafa Amin and many others began to direct harsh criticism against Qasim.[504] The al-Azhar university also began its propaganda against Qasim, placing the blame on him for not realizing the dream of Arab unity. In the wake of Mosul's aftermath, Shaltut the Shaikh of al-Azhar announced a *fatwa* asserting that 'I have no doubt that the people who committed these massacres are fighting God and the Prophet and who seek for deviation on the earth'.[505]

On the other hand, Naser encouraged the activities of *Dar al-Taqrib* (the Rapprochement House). Established in early 1947 under the auspices and efforts of Shaikh Muhammad Taqi al-Qumi, with great support from the Egyptian academic and writer Mustafa 'Abdul al-Raziq, this society brought together moderate Sunni scholars

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[502] Brunner, R, ibid, pp.251-83.
[503] Zebiri, K, *Mahmud Shaltut and Islamic Modernism*, Oxford University Press-United States-1993, pp.23-5; Brunner, R, ibid, p.284-5.
[504] Shalabi, 'A A, *al-'Alaqat al-Siyasayya bayna Misr wal Iraq 1951-1963*, p.442.
[505] Azhar, vol.31, No, 3, September 1959, p.359; Azhar, vol.31, No, 4&5, November 1959, p.387

of al-Azhar and the Shi'i '*ulama* of Qum and Najaf in order to work as a reconciliation body to ease the differences between the two sects and to achieve rapprochement. [506] A magazine was issued by this society, called *Risalat al-Islam* (the Message of Islam). Sunni scholars like Muhmood Shaltut, Muhammad al-Ghazali, 'Omar al-Telmisani and the like worked closely with Shi'i '*ulama* such as Muhammad Jawad Mughniya, Muhammad Taqi al-Qumi, Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim and many others. No doubt, the activities of this society brought Shi'i '*ulama* close to Egypt, the fact that enabled the al-Azhar's '*ulama* to move towards them in regard to common political issues.[507] Truly, this society (*Dar al-Taqrib*), had been given a breath of fresh air by Naser who was seeking to approach Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf and Qum so as to orchestrate pressures on both Qasim and the Shah.

Whereas Naser cemented his relationship with Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq and Iran, another player was in keen interest in Najaf's view. Actually, Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf had been subject to direct and very strong pressure from the Shah of Iran who sought Najaf's aid to counter Qasim.

Najaf and regional politics: Al-Hakim, Qasim and the Shah

Since the removal of Mosadaq's government in August 1953, Shah Muhammad Rida bolstered his position and succeeded in curbing the *'ulama*'s position for a while. This step was part of a wide modernisation program that involved constructing good relations with the West. The Shah went far further when he announced his intention to recognize Israel in 1960. This last step, in particular, offended Naser as Egypt was engaged in war with Israel at that time.

On the Iraqi front, however, the Shah was interested in strengthening his connections with Najaf's *'ulama*, though for different considerations. In fact, the Shah was in pressing need to put pressures through Najaf's '*ulama* on Qasim at least to confine the

[506] Brunner, R, ibid, pp.129-31.

[507] Bagley, F R C, the Azhar and Shi'ism, *MW*, vol, 50, No 2, April 1960, pp.122-129.

Communist threat within the Iraqi boundaries. No wonder, the Shah expressed his concerns over Communist close threat to his border and looked to his friends in Najaf in an attempt to contain their common foe (Communism).

Although the dispute over the border and *Shat al-Arab* had always been at the heart of the long conflict between Iraq and Iran, the Shah of Iran had added another reason to regard Qasim's regime as a major threat; that is providing nutrition for the Iranian Communists and Iraq's good relationship with the Soviet Union. From the end of 1940 up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Tudeh Party had been one of most powerful adversaries of the Shah's regime. Escaping the Shah's constraints, members of the Tudeh Party made their way to hide in Iraq. For his part, Qasim found a good ally in the Tudeh Party in retaliation for the Shah's assistance to the Kurdish rebels in Iraq. Qasim, therefore, provided the Iranian Tudeh Party with material assistance 'such as setting up anti-Iranian propaganda machine in the form of Radio Baghdad, or help in providing logistics for training the communists militants on Iraqi soil were meant to destabilize and influence Iranian politics'.[508] Furthermore, many members of the Tudeh Party 'moved to Iraq and lived there after the July coup and SAVAK kept a close tab on them and provided Tehran with their full names'.[509] Qasim also renewed Iraq's claims for the Arab Gulf and Arab territories in *al-Ahwaz* (Khuzestan in the Southern parts of Iran).[510]

Like Naser, the Shah found himself diametrically opposed to Qasim's regional policies and had good reason to create troubles for his regime. The Shah, who was aware of the growing confidence of the Iranian *'ulama*, might have come to the conclusion that moving the position of *marja'i al-taqleed* to Najaf would not only alleviate the pressures that he was facing from the Persian *mujtahids*, but would also secure a good

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[508] Farzaneh, M M, Interregional rivalry cloaked in Iraqi Arab nationalism and Iran secular nationalism, and Shiite ideology, *IJCI S*, vol, 2, No.3, 2008, p.397.
[509] Ibid.
[510] Confidential from Foreign Office to Tehran.No.1685, October 15, 1959; Confidential from Foreign Office to Tehran.No.17, January 5,1960; secret from Foreign Office to Tehran.No.409, March 17,1960; Marr, P, ibid.p.109.

friend against their shared common challenger: Qasim. For this reason, the Shah promoted his support for al-Hakim's claim to the *marja'iyya* in Najaf rather than rival *mujtahids* in Iran. The Shah was hoping 'to lessen the importance of Qum and prevent the emergence of a centre of clerical power within Iran. A *mujtahid* resident in Najaf- one moreover of Arab birth- might be though unlikely to be intimately aware of and concerned with the affairs of Iran'.[511]

From Burujirdi to al-Hakim: the *Marja'iyya*'s question

Certainly, al-Hakim's position as a sole *marja'i* in both Iraq and Iran was bolstered after the death of Grand Ayatollah Burujirdi in March 1961. Immediately, the Shah sent al-Hakim a condolence letter, the letter that indicated his recognition of al-Hakim's *marja'iyya* rather than any other *marja'i* in Iran.[512] In fact, Muhammad Rida Shah realised the gravity of the opposition led by Ayatollah Burujirdi since December 1959 against the land reform bill proposed by the Shah himself.[513] Although the Shah had established a very friendly relationship with Burujirdi, the latter felt threatened by the land reform, and thus voiced his clear opposition to the order. The negative attitude of the Iranian '*ulama* seems to have been more related to the fear of Communism and social policies that might threaten their economic positions. Apart from that, Burujirdi 'maintained a cool aloofness from political involvement … an aloofness from which he deviated only at the end of his life over the question of land reform'.[514] Seemingly, Burujirdi's opposition to the Iranian land reform was present in the Shah's mind when the latter granted his support to al-Hakim's *marja'iyya* rather than standing by his Iranian compatriot.

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[511] Al-Gar, H, 'the Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth-Century Iran', p.244, in (2231-55), (editor) Keddie, N, *Scholars, Saints and Sufis, Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, University of California Press-1972; Akhavi, S, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran, Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period*, New York-1980, p.100.
[512] See al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam al-Sayyed Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr*, pp.646-8.
[513] Mortimer, E, *Faith and Power, the Politics of Islam*, London, 1982, pp.314-5.
[514] Akhavi, S, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*, ibid, p.24.

Indeed, Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim emerged as the most powerful and respected *mujtahid* in Najaf by the end of 1950s. As great *mujtahids* and '*ulama* like Abu al-Hasan al-Isfahani, Kashif al-Ghita and al-Jazaeri passed away, al-Hakim was then able of claiming his position as a leader for the Shi'a community in Iraq.[515] Despite the fact that more than one candidate was still living in Najaf (Sayyed Hussain al-Hamami and Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei as the most prominent among them), al-Hakim's *marja'iyya* was singled out owing to many personal, local and external reasons. First of all, al-Hakim, who was born and bred in Iraq to an Iraqi family, had been known for his active political role since the beginning of his life. He was a close assistant to Sayyed Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi, the leader of the Jihad Campaign.[516]

Al-Hakim received his early teachings at the hands of al-Haboobi, then attended the lessons of Shaikh Muhammad Kadhim al-Khurasani, the advocator of the *Mashruta* reformative trend, Shaikh Dhia al-Din al-'Iraqi, the great *'usuli* scholar and lastly Shaikh Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini, the author of *Tanbih al-Umma wa Tanzih* al-Mila.[517] Close attachment to activists (al-Haboobi and al-Khurasani) and the dilemma of quasi-quietist (al-Na'ini) possibly had left a deep impact on al-Hakim's political attitude, as we shall see. This attachment had deepened his knowledge of *fiqh* and *usul al-Fiqh*, as he stood up later as a master in these two principal, which are prerequisites for *marja'iyya*. Al-Hakim, therefore, was well known for his great juridical insights, piety and courage. Understandably, al-Hakim's reputation as a *marja'i* was enhanced by the semi-quiet attitude adopted by both al-Hamami and al-Khoei.

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[515] Akhavi stated that Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita and Hibat al-Din al-Shihristani were among the candidates for *marja'iyya* in Najaf after the death of Burujirdi in March 1961. Again, as I mentioned earlier, Kashif Al-Ghita died in 1954 and with regard to al-Shihristani he was not among candidates simply for his limited knowledge in terms of *fiqh* and *'usul al-fiqh* though he was senior and was known for his active role in Iraqi politics since the turn of the 20th century. See Akhavi, S, ibid, p.100.

[516] See chapter three.

[517] For more details about these *'ulama*, see chapter, 2.

Thanks to these factors, al-Hakim extended his networks of agents inside Iraq from Basrah in the south, to remote places in the north, where the Kurd Shi'is and Turkomans live. Al-Hakim also enjoyed a world wide reputation as his agents covered Iran, India, Pakistan, Africa, the Gulf and Egypt. These vast networks looked after Shi'a communities and provided them with religious guidance and even political direction. Like no other *marja'i*, al-Hakim had also built good relations with Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, in addition to some other states. This later fact made al-Hakim more exposed to regional political considerations, which conflicted sometimes with the complexities of the Iraqi political situation. This is to say that while al-Hakim had been capable of exercising his influence during this period because Qasim was under great pressures from both Naser and the Shah of Iran, both in turn, pressurized al-Hakim for their own interests.

Ironically, while both Naser and the Shah quarreled with each other and both defied Qasim, they supported al-Hakim's *marja'iyya* in different ways. Given the burden of domestic issues and contrasting connections, al-Hakim seems to have felt the weight of political developments, hence variably responded to both internal and external mutations. According to al-Qazwini, Sayyed al-Hakim had been under pressure from different groups, each of them represented specific interests. Al-Qazwini asserts that 'there were four active groups around al-Hakim; each of them represented a certain authority, but with conflicting interests. Ibrahim al-Yazdi, his son-in-law (still living in Najaf in 1995) represented Iranian interests. His son, Muhammad Rida al-Hakim, was to entertain nationalist interests under the leadership of Naser of Egypt; while his other son, Yousif al-Hakim, (d.1991) used to insist on not involving the religious leadership in unimportant affairs. His son, Mahdi al-Hakim (assassinated in the Sudan in 1988)

and Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim…, together with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, insisted on a new approach to applying Islamic tenets to social and economic life'.[518]

Truly, al-Hakim has showed a great deal of personal skills in tackling even conflicting regional interests. He maintained, for example, excellent relations with Egypt and Iran, keeping a balance between the opposing claims of Naser and the Shah and undertaking to appease both of them. A good example of al-Hakim's competent attitude was the question of recognizing Israel. Al-Hakim received a letter from Shaikh Shaltut entreating his assistance over the Shah's intention to recognize Israel. Shaltut urged Sayyed al-Hakim to use his good relations with the Shah to impede such step 'warning that this issue may lead to a great damage especially it is issued from the Shah, who is a Shi'i of our Imami (Shi'i) brothers'.[519] Al-Hakim, in turn, posted two letters to Abdullah al-Bihbihani, his representative in Qum and Sayyed Burujirdi rather than addressing the Shah himself. Al-Hakim assured Shaikh Shaltut that 'since we received the news of this recognition, we proceeded to inform the Iranian officials our serious condemnation through some of our '*ulama* in Tehran, and we explained the seriousness of the situation and discontent among the Islamic Umma… and we received the replay stating that no such recognition was issued from Iran towards Israel'.[520] Rather than addressing the Shah directly, al-Hakim apparently was attempting to transfer the burden of the blame from his shoulder to Iran. Al-Hakim, however, came under ample pressure from diverse local, Arab and regional powers over his position towards the ICP. This issue, in particular, had been the real test that brought Qasim's honeymoon with Najaf's '*ulama* to its end.

Al-Hakim, Qasim and the ICP: the final solution

[518] Al-Qazwini, J, the School of Najaf, in Jabar, F (editor), *Ayatollah, Ideologists and Sufis*. Footnote, N, 28, p.262.
[519] Al-Shami, H, ibid, pp.483-4.
[520] Ibid, pp, 485-6.

Although Shi'i '*ulama* had been bent on fending of Communism, they were nonetheless divided over how to tackle this profound challenge into two broad groups: those who advocated pursuing a religious war against Communism, and another group called for an open cultural and philosophical debate in the hope of bringing back these stray Shi'is. The first group, which comprised of *Jama'at al-'Ulama* (mainly those close to nationalists) and some Persian *'ulama*, preferred pursuing the first option. The second group included grand Ayatollah Sayyed Hussain al-Hamami, Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Shaikh 'Ali Kashif al-Ghita and some other *mujtahids*. Whereas the first group thought of such religious campaign against Communism as the 'final solution', the second group was of the view that a persuasive approach was needed considering the fact that most Iraqi Communists were Shi'i. Obviously, Sayyed al-Hakim was undecided over the way he should pursue the matter. There is no doubt that Ba'thists were pushing hard for the first option. Reiterating the religious anti-Communism crusade led by the al-Azhar in Egypt and instructed by Naser, Ba'thists came to conclude that the '*fatwa* weapon' is in their hand against Communism. It is reported that Najafi Ba'thists, like Muhsin al-Shaikh Radi and Sidqi Abu Tabikh often approached al-Hakim's son, Muhammad Rida who was himself pro-nationalists and a close friend to the Ba'th.[521] Evidently, al-Hakim's son played an inevitable role in realizing the Ba'th hopes by winning over his father's heart.[522]

As indicated previously, Sayyed al-Hakim has been extremely liable to regional pressures and maneuvers, and this made him prone to take action against Communists. Considering the fact that the Shah was an ardent opponent of Qasim's regime and the

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[521] Interview with Dr. Jabar Nael; interview with S. K, London-22/04/2010; al-Kashmiri, H, *Resael wa Mesael*, (n, p, n, d), p.8. Al-Hakim's son was arrested after the Shi'a uprising of 1991 for being suspected involving in this uprising and subsequently executed later. See al-Rufa'ai, 'A, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, ibid, pp.169-71. Al-Rufa'ai, himself, was a Najafi who joined the Ba'th since the late of 1950s and served later as an ambassador for Iraq in Yemen.

[522] Sayyed al-Hiliw states that there are some rumors that link al-Hakim's *fatwa* to the Ba'th. He rejects this view, arguing that the *fatwa* was issued for pure religious reasons. See Ibn al-Najaf ('Amir al-Hiliw), *Tarikh al-Harakat al-Islamayya fi al-Iraq*, Beirut, 1985, p.14.

ICP and bearing in mind the latter backing of the Iranian Communists, it is more likely that the Shah induced some of the Persian ‘*ulama* in Najaf, notably Ibrahim al-Yazdi, al-Hakim’s son-in-law to take a firm line against Communists.

Politics of *fatwa*

Time and again, Naser had good reason to push ahead in this direction. While his relations deteriorated rapidly with Qasim, Naser tightened his contacts and correspondences with the Shi’i *marja’iyya* in Najaf. Obviously, Naser prepared the ground very well for another step through his diplomatic representation in Baghdad. For this purpose, Muhammad Kaboul, the attaché in the Embassy of the United Arab Republic in Baghdad used to visit Najaf, convying Naser’s’ letters to Sayyed al-Hakim.[523] Although there is no information about the issues discussed during these meetings, it is obvious that containing Communism in Iraq was at the top of the list. Further to introducing Shi’a jurisprudence into the al-Azhar curricula, Naser entreated in 1959 Shaikh Shaltut to proclaim Shi’ism as an Islamic creed equal to all other Sunni schools. Consequently, Shaltut announced on 6 July 1959 his *fatwa*, stating that ‘Islam does not require a Muslim to follow a particular *madhhab* (doctrine)… the Ja’fari school of thought, which is also known as *‘ al-Shia al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna Ashariyyah*, is a school of thought that is religiously correct to follow in worship as are other Sunni schools of thought’.[524] Whether this *fatwa* was brought by the influence of the ‘*ulama* in Najaf or Qum, it was nonetheless a well planned act designed by Naser and decreed by al-Azhar in order to bring Shi’i ‘*ulama* close to Naser at the expense of both Qasim and the Shah. Certainly, Shi’i ‘*ulama* responded positively and quickly celebrated this *fatwa* as another breakthrough for the Shi’a creed in the heart land of Sunni Islam

[523] Al-Fkaiki, H, *Awkar al-Hazeemat, Tajribati fi Hizb al-Ba’ath Al-Iraqi*, London-1993, pp.117-8.
[524] Azhar, vol, 31, No, 2, August 1959, pp 238-244

In fact, the Mosul events in March 1959 had alarmed Qasim of the strength of the ICP. Thus, the honeymoon between Qasim and the ICP was short and came to its end soon when Qasim began to realize the serious damaging impacts wrought by Communists upon his regime. Qasim openly distanced himself from the ICP especially after Kirkuk's events of July 1959. He explicitly condemned 'the perpetrators of these crimes placing his blame on the ICP for detracting workers attention rather than raising production'.[525] Qasim set about a series of measures aimed at weakening the Communist grip over media, militia and even the Party itself. He banned the Communist newspaper, *Itihad al-Sha'b*, dismissed several sympathetic officers, closed down pro-Communist unions and most importantly denied the real Communist Party legal permission whereas Da'ud al-Sayegh, an old deserted Communist, was encouraged to have a license for a nominal subordinated party. Most important, however, a new yet a deep schism, inflicted the ICP, between the Secretary General of the group (Salam 'Adil and aided by Jamal al-Haidari) and the 'Clique of Four' 'Amir 'Abd-ul-lah, Baha'u-d-Din Nuri, Zaki Khairi and Muhammad Hussain Abu-l-'lss. The split made the Party no more than rival factions vying for legitimacy or power. The Party, thus, weakened because of its internal feuds and the government's constant campaigns of arrests and trials.[526]

Shi'i activists and nationalists took this opportunity to escalate their propaganda attacks against the ICP after this period. Both Shi'i activists and nationalists employed, for instance, the *Shu'ubiyya* term in their polemical strife with the ICP, labeling the latter as 'the home of the enemies of *al-Umma al-Arabaya* (the Arab Nation). Muhammad Hussain al-Saghir (a Shi'i activist with close attachment to the *marja'iyya*) wrote that: 'Communists are shu'ubiyya. They hate Arabs and hide hatred for them. At the same time, they are friends of Jews and Israel. Regardless of their home, (living in the Soviet Union or the rest

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[525] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Harakat al-Marxayya*, ibid, pp.92-3.

[526] FO 371/ 140918, Confidential, 1013/301/59, British Embassy, Baghdad to Sir Roger Stevens, London, July 2, 1959; Batatu, H, ibid.pp.942-51; Ismail, ibid, pp.93-100; al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.92-9;

of the world), all Communists are foreigners, and conceal hatred for Arabs. In particular in the Arab countries, most Communists either came from Persian, Turk or other small minorities who look to Arabs as an obstacle in their way'.[527]

Al-Dujaili who had denunciated previously *Shu'ubiyya* in 1948, edited anew his long article in late 1959 specifically to extol the barbaric atrocities (referring to Mousl and Kirkuk events) that were committed by 'these *Shu'ubiy* gangs in the name of *sha'uouayya* (Communism)'.[528] In viewing Communism equivalent to *Shu'ubiyya*, a non-Arab movement and alien to the Iraqi people, Ba'thists and Shi'i activists had come close together in one camp whose task was to hold back this Communist encroachment form destroying Arab dignity. By implying this term, Ba'thists and Shi'i activists also were working hard to undermine their Communists' rivals, who gradually but steadily became synonymous to foreign elements rather than Iraqis or Arabs. Communism therefore, was no longer linked to Arabs and simply perceived as an anti-Arab phenomenon or movement that was invented to eradicate the great values of Arabs. Linking Communism to non-Arab people not only served as a means to dehumanize the Communist competitor, but also consolidated the sense of common purpose and destiny between nationalists and Shi'i activists. Consequently, Arabism had provided not only a social tie to Najafi activists, but most importantly, a common ground needed for pursuing shared political agendas. Sanctioning these political actions by religious decrees gave this political and ideological confrontation a kind of religious mission. Under this understanding, we might look into the ensuing massacres that were perpetrated against Communists immediately after the fall of Qasim's regime in

[527] Al-Saghir, M H, *al-Shaoua'ayya.Mabda Hadam, Wathaeq Tareekhayya wa Shhadat Khateerah,* Baghdad-1960, pp.59-63.

[528] Al-Dujaili, 'A A, *al- Shu'ubiyya wa Adwaraha al-Tarekhayya fi al-Alam al-Arabi*, Najaf-1960, p.18.

February 1963 and the mild attitude taken by the *marja'iyya* against the brutal Ba'thists.[529]

Nationalists and Ba'thists in particular have always insisted on the claim that only non-Arab people were inclined to the Communist ideology and so were affiliated to the ICP. This claim has to be taken with a grain of salt, however. In Najaf in particular, where the ethnic fabric of the Shi'a community reflects wide and diverse backgrounds, we find that Arabs who joined the ICP had formed a good majority within the membership, hailing from some of most distinguished *Sadah* families in the city. This applies to both educated and illiterate marginalized people with humble social positions within lower classes. Najafis who belonged to the same families, clans or tribes, may embrace opposite political views, and may be divided by party affiliation though loyal to one religious doctrine. Party membership thus cut across Najafi community according to ideological orientation, which appeared a more relevant factor in determining the stand of specific political camps.[530] We should admit, however that non-Arabs (notably the Persians), non-Muslims communities (Jews, Christians and Sabae) and other ethnic groups like the Kurds, were all impressively represented in a good number in the ICP. It is true, therefore, to say that part of the success of ICP in assimilating different segments of the Iraqi society within its formation was made part of the weapon used against them by other parties, namely the Ba'th.[531] The Ba'th, on the other hand, has focused mainly on the elite educated people with a good majority of Arab people. Non-Arab from both Shi'is and Sunnis and non-Muslims were present within the Ba'th at this period, however.

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[529] For more details about the massacres committed against the Iraqi Communists, see Batatu, H, ibid, p.985; Ismail, T, ibid, pp.107-9; Sluglett & Sluglett, ibid, p.86.
[530] For good analysis of this point, see Zubaida, S, *Islam, the People & the State*, ibid, pp.90-4.
[531] Crushing Communists in Iraq accompanied with an active religious campaign waged by Shi'i and Sunni institutions, which successfully linked them to Jews. For a Communist view, see for example, Bahae Nuri, *Mudhakarat*, p.p.99, 116-9. For nationalist view, see al-Safwani, S, *Hadhah al-Shu'ubiyya*, ibid, pp.8-8, 28-9. See also al-Saghir, M H, *al-Shu'ubiyya.Mabda Hadam*, ibid.

Ironically, the Ba'th's accusations against ICP members, which were levelled and propagated by Shi'i nationalists and Shi'i religious activists, was specifically used against their Shi'i coreligionists, only due to them being affiliated to different political groups. This testifies to the fact that Arab-Persian rivalry in Najaf played a fundamental role in shaping political, social and religious trajectories.[532] As we stated earlier, Sunni nationalists were to later utilize this charge against Shi'is in general as an instrument to exclude them from 'the good people' category, who have the right to participate in political life.

Iraqi Communists: fighting all enemies

Thus, Iraqi Communists had to confront severe governmental procedures, quasi-alliance of nationalists and Islamic activists inside Iraq as well as amounting pressures from Iraq's neighbors and regional powers. Rather than relieving these pressures, Qasim and the Communists mistrusted each other and both continued to lose grounds in Iraq, providing their rivals in the region with new weapons to be used against them. Communists, on the one hand, escalated their attacks against Shi'i '*ulama* notably in Najaf and Karbala. Sayyed Muhammad Bahr-ul'Ulum relates, that Najafi Communists used to terrorize the '*ulama* in the city, to the extent that their personal safety was not guaranteed while walking at the night.[533] Communist activists of *Qiwat al-Miqawama al-Sha'bayya* (Forces of Popular Resistance) usually organized these attacks against *'ulama*.[534] Sayyed al-Hakim himself was subject of repeated attacks in Najaf and Karbala. In Najaf, the home of the *marja'iyya*, Sayyed al-Hakim came under a few attacks carried out by Communist elements primarily in al-'Amarah quarter, another

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[532] A good example in hand is the role of Muhsin Al-Shaikh Radi in torturing and tkilling Salam 'Adil, his Najafi fellow. Shi'i Ba'thists seemingly considered 'Adil of Persian origin (hence unequal to Arabs). For Communist view, see Yousif, Thaminah, *Salam 'Adil*, pp.385-97. For Ba'thi's account, see al-Rufa'ae, 'A, ibid, p.200-3 and al-Fkaiki, H, ibid, p.38 & 254-8.
[533] Interview with Muhammad Bahr-ul 'Ulum. See also Al-Hakim, M.B, in, *Shoon Islamayya*. No.8-9, p.41.
[534] Al-Hussaini, A, *al-Imam Al-Hakimal-Sayyed Muhsin al-Tabatabae*. (Najaf-1384H).p.88

Communist hide out in the city.[535] In Karbala, a planned incident carried out by a Communist group, when they attempted in 1959 to block al-Hakim's patrol, besieging his car in an attempt to drag him out. Al-Hakim barely escaped this attack thanks to his bodyguards and some other Islamic activists.[536]

Obviously, the Najafi '*ulama* seem to have been at loss as no distinction was made between Qasim and the ICP. Rather than differentiating between the two, al-Hakim and Shi'i *ulama* were of the view that Qasim and Communists were still in reality standing for their united fundamental precepts yet pursuing different tactics.[537]

Qasim unsuccessfully strived to bridge the gap with Sayyed al-Hakim, when the former expressed his good will by paying a visit to al-Hakim in Najaf. The latter, however, rejected all attempts unless the Personal Status Law was changed. Clearly, al-Hakim and Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf were deeply insulted by this Law and considered it as an indication of the increasing Communist influence upon Qasim. The *marja'iyya* in Najaf probably came to conclude that Qasim was himself an ardent Communist believer and nothing will change his convictions. As someone who was close to the events in Baghdad and to the *marja'iyya* in Najaf, Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Shabibi, had expressed his disappointment with Qasim, stating that Qasim is 'a crazy terrorist and Communist dictator, now only supported by the Communists and the lowest elements in the rabble proletariat'.[538]

Without a doubt, al-Hakim's *fatwa* against the ICP did not come as a response to a specific issue or event that provoked such strong action. In other words, the *fatwa* would be more appropriate if it was issued after the notorious attacks on al-Hakim himself and other Shi'i '*ulama* or in response to the events in Kirkuk. Rather the *fatwa* came when the ICP was in its hard time so to rub salt into its wounds.

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[535] Anon (al-Hilaw. 'A). *al-Harakat al-Islamayya fi al-'Iraq*, ibid.p.43; *al-Iraq bayna al-Madi wal Hadhir wal Mustaqbal*, p.888.
[536] Al-Momin, 'Ali, *Sanewat al-Jamr*, ibid, p.39.
[537] See for example, Al-Momin, 'Ali, ibid, pp.39-41.
[538] EQ 1015/532, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, September 24, 1959.

Al-Hakim's decree against Communism was seemingly motivated mainly by internal political rivalries between nationalists and Communists and in compliences with foreign political pressure rather than being a genuine expression of religious concern.[539] However, it is not clear whether the main driving force behind this new organized campaign was Shi'i activists or Shi'i Ba'thists. Indeed, good cooperation between Najafi Ba'thists and other Shi'i activists made it easy for both to approach Muhammad Rida al-Hakim to issue such a statement. As observed earlier, al-Hakim himself turned down a request made by the Istiqlal nationalist party to issue a *fatwa* against the ICP in the mid 1950s. Probably, al-Hakim was neither convinced nor willing to use a religious *fatwa* in such a political controversy. Shaikh Shareef Kashif al-Ghita states that, al-Hakim was cautious to issue a *fatwa*. Shaikh Shareef professes that he provided al-Hakim with the statement made by Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita against the ICP in 1948.[540] Al-Hakim's *fatwa*, which was issued on 12 February 1960, echoed Kashif al-Ghita's concerns and words and read like this:

'Any connection with the Communist Party is unlawful. Such a connection is in the nature of disbelief and infidelity, or it is supportive of disbelief and infidelity'.[541]

Once again, the grounds for al-Hakim's *fatwa* seem unclear and unfounded. There is good reason to assume that Ba'thists may have stood behind this religio-political movement in Baghdad, Hilla, Najaf and elsewhere. Furthermore, some historical precedents may suggest that in such a controversial situation, a *fatwa* might be issued on behalf of the *marja'i*, leaving for his assistants (in this case Muhammad Rida and al-Yazdi) to broadcast the *fatwa*. For example, while the majority of Shi'i '*ulama* sided with al-Kilani's nationalist coup of 1941, Abu al-Hasan al-Isfahani, took a silent

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[540] Interview with Shaikh Shareef Kashif al-Ghita, Najaf-20/12/2005.

[541] See the *fatwa* in, al-Hilfi, K, *Al-Shoua'ayya Kufron wa Ilhad*, Najaf- 1960, p.4 &7; al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, p.320; al-Momin, 'A, ibid, p.43. This translation is taken from Jabar, F, *the Shi'i Movement in Iraq*, ibid, p.124.Jabar maintains that the *fatwa* was in response to both the Agrarian Land Reform and the Personal Status Law. Brearing in mind that the Agrarian Reform was issued in September 1958, then the time gap might raise the question about the timing.

position, issuing merely a shy statement under the pressure of his close assistant Shaikh 'Abdul Karim al-Jazaeri. Al-Isfahani however, publicly denied this *fatwa* soon after the failure of the movement 'as Rashid Ali had fled from Iraq' and the monarchy was reinstalled again.[542]Another good example of how assistants may work on behalf of the *marja'i* himself is the famous Tobacco *fatwa*, which is widely believed to be al-Shirazi words. Some scholars, however, cast doubts over this *fatwa*, suspecting that some of al-Shirazi's entourage rather than the *marja'i* himself might have written this *fatwa* for the interests of some Persian merchants in the bazaars.[543]

Bearing in mind both internal pressures brought by nationalists and *Jama'at al-'Ulama* and external incitements (Iran and Egypt), it seems that this *fatwa* was intended to be a message of good will aimed at both Naser and the Shah. While the *fatwa* reflects, on the one hand, the scope of nationalist penetration among the Shi'a institution, it sheds a light, on the other hand, on al-Hakim's political beliefs and orientation. Evidently, Al-Hakim was a sympathetic towards the nationalist trend, and this was mainly due to his affection to Naser's regime and the Palestine question. Nationalist ideas have always been imbued within the Shi'a milieu, as we observed with Shaikh Kashif al-Ghita who often expressed extreme nationalist views especially concerning the Palestine question. Similarly, Sayyed Al-Hakim has showed a great deal of concern towards the Palestine question and other Arab issues, the fact that associated him with Arab nationalists.[544] The attachment of Shi'i *'ulama* to nationalist issues undoubtedly rendered them on the side of Ba'thists at the expense of Communists. Sayyed Muhammad Bahr-ul 'Ulum affirms that Shi'i '*ulama* were by and large under the influence of Naser's nationalist

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[542] No.1512, Baghdad, the Foreign Service of the U.S.A Division of Near Eastern Affairs, December, 2, 1946; al-Qamoosi, M, R, *Fi al-Adab al-Najafi, Qadhaya wa Rijal*, Baghdad-2004, pp.294-5.

[543] See Algar, Hamid. *Religion and State in Iran, 1758-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*.p.215. During the Shi'i uprising of 1991, *fatwas* were issued on behalf of Sayyed al-Khoei who later denied his connection with these *fatwas* once the uprising forcefully suppressed.

[544] See, for example, al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Imam al-Sayyed Muhammad*, ibid, pp.326-37.

current and recipients of his ideas. No wonder, the majority of Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq and Iran had showed undisputable support for Naser and opposed their national governments. Al-Hakim, in particular, expressed his solid support to Naser during the Tripartite Aggression in 1956 and criticized the Iraqi government for its unsympathetic attitude.[545] It could be said that Naser's relationship with Shi'i '*ulama* might have started from this moment as Naser recognized the weight of the '*ulama* authority. Naser paid this factor more attention after intensifying the confrontation with Qasim and the Communists. On the other hand, the Ba'th benefited from Naser's heroic image especially after the short-lived success of unification between Egypt and Syria and the Ba'th's role in achieving this experience. The Ba'th also owes much of its prosperity, whether in Iraq or across other Arab countries to Naser's popular statue not vice versa. Naser's charismatic and defiant image facilitated the Ba'th extending its membership to new recruits at the expense of Communism, which suffered a real setback.[546]

Although the ICP was already in disarray because of Qasim's severe actions against its members, al-Hakim's *fatwa* nonetheless had a tremendous impact upon the Communists incomparable with Kashif al-Ghita's statement in 1948. This was proven to some extent by the powerless response of the Party defenders in Najaf, where they used to enjoy wide support.

While the *fatwa* was applauded in Egypt and Iran, it became a subject of controversial debates in Najaf itself. No doubt, the *fatwa* was welcomed in Cairo by both Naser and the '*ulama* of al-Azhar, who praised the '*ulama* for their defiance, considering it as a good sign for new looming counter- revolution against Qasim and his Communist ally. The al-Azhar magazine reported how 'the Shi'i '*ulama* warn their imitators of Communist danger, celebrating not only al-Hakim's recent *fatwa* but also Kashif al-

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[545] See Al-Hassani, 'A A, 'Azmat al-Soa'yys wa Tatheeraha fi al-'Iraq', *Al-Mosem*, No.9/10, ibid, p.40.

[546] Dawisha, A, *Arab Nationalism*, ibid, p.222; al-Fikaiki, ibid, p.51.

Ghita's earlier statement and another two *fatwas* issued by Ayatollah'Abdul Hadi al-Shirazi and Shaikh 'Abdul Karim al-Jazaeri.[547]

In retrospect, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim (the son of al-Hakim and founder of SCIRI, who was assassinated in August 2003), admits that his father's *fatwa* 'was received positively by Naser', who praised Sayyed al-Hakim for this bold stand against the Communists, and this led Naser to lay his emphasis on the al-Azhar to recognize Shi'ism as a fifth *madhhab* equal to other Islamic Sunni ones.[548] In reality, the opposite is true. This is to say that al-Hakim's action was rather a thank you to Naser, not vice versa, as Shaltut's *fatwa* came about in July 1959 while al-Hakim's decree came later.

Tehran, too welcomed the *fatwa* 'because of its own continuing concern with the underground Tudah Party, whose activities might have received encouragement from Qasim's patronage of the Iraqi Communist Party'.[549] Above all, the *fatwa* reinforced the good relationship between al-Hakim and the Shah and made the latter more convinced of al-Hakim's *marja'iyya*. This manifested promptly in the following year after the death of Sayyed Burjurdi in February 1961, when the Shah sent a condolence telegraph to al-Hakim, the move that ended any hope for the rising *mujtahid* Ruholahh Khomeini and his revolutionary camp.

In Najaf itself, however, the *fatwa* was subjected to legal disagreement. Although the majority of '*ulama* received the *fatwa* by consent, Sayyed Hussain al-Hamami, probably second in rank of the grand Ayatollahs then living in Najaf, declared his objection.[550] Al-Hamami openly renounced any pleas for issuing similar *fatwa*, arguing that Communists are still to be treated as Muslims, indicating implicitly to the political

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[547] Al-Azhar, No.32, Part.1, June-1960, pp.119-120.

[548] Al-Hakim, M B, *al-Imam Al-Hakim, Nadhrah Tahleelaya Shamilah*, Qum-1424, pp, 189-190 & 237.

[549] Akhavi, S, ibid.p.98.

[550] About al-Hamami, see *al-Sagheer,* M H, *Qadat al-Fikr al-Dini wal Sayyasi fi al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Beirut-2008, pp.11-48; al-Hamami, M, Al-Sayyed Hussain al-Mousawi al-Hamami (1289-1379H) *al-Mosem*, No.7, 1990, pp.987-994.

aspects surrounding these *fatwas*.[551] It is reported that al-Hamami alluded to his predecessor Sayyed Abu al-Hassan al-Isfahani, who rejected in the mid 1940 similar offers made by some Iranian merchants to issue a *fatwa* against the Iranian Communists.[552] Sayyed al-Hamami, who was known for his piety thus came under a slur campaign with accusations made against him on the grounds that he was influenced by his Communist son Muhammad 'Ali.[553]

Al-Hakim's antagonistic attitude towards Qasim's regime and the Iraqi Communists is reminiscent of Burujirdi, Kashani and Bihbihani's hostile attitude towards Mosaddaq in 1953. Burujirdi, Bihbihani and many other '*ulama* held a negative attitude towards Mosaddaq over his heavy reliance on the Communist elements during his confrontation with the western oil companies; consequently they were fearful of spreading atheist Communism in Iran. The *'ulama's* antagonistic attitude, however, had contributed in undermining popular support for Mosadaq, and paving the grounds for the coup that was led by the United States and Britain in 1953. Similarly, Najaf's antagonistic position towards Iraqi Caommunists developed into unmistakable opposition to Qasim, the fact that aggravated his situation inside and outside Iraq.

In the American administration, there were those who pushed for 'a Mossadegh type operation to overthrow Qasim and put pro-Western military officers in power', approaching Naser 'to explore parallel measures, which the US and the UAR might take with regard to Baghdad, and expressed support for his anti-Communist campaign'.[554]

Surprisingly enough, the Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq wholeheartedly welcomed Mosaddaq's policies in obvious contrast to their Iranian counterparts, the fact that reflects partial

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551 Anon, 'A, *al-Harakat al-Islamayyat fi al-'Iraq*, ibid, p.15.
552 Interview with Dr. Jabar Nail, Kufa, 19/07/2005. For assessment of al-Hamami and his characteristics, see (editor) Mughnayya, 'A.H, *Tajarub Muhammad Jawad Mughnayya*, Beirut-1980, pp.43-4.
553 Interviews with Dr. Jabar Nail; al-Momin, K
554 Barrett, R, C, ibid, pp.118-9.

divergent views over political affairs in both countries.[555] However, Najafi '*ulama* now showed similar concerns this time over Qasim's direction and the potential of dominating atheist Communism in Iraq.

Another organized campaign to denounce Communism came now from *al-Fayha* weekly newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Islamic Party in Hilla in October 1960. The Islamic Party published a memorandum in al-Fayha, signed by both Shi'is and Sunnis. The memorandum also held Qasim mainly responsible for the Communist infiltration.[556]

Nationalists and Ba'thists in particular were to benefit the most of these *fatwas*. For the Ba'th, the message was clear: both Sunni and Shi'i people oppose Communism and Qasim is solely responsible for this atheist threat. Qasim, who supported anti-religious Communism, accordingly, had no legitimacy. Surely, these *fatwas* have exacerbated troubles for Qasim for the interests of his enemies in Iraq (notably nationalists) and the region (Iran and Egypt). Qasim's isolation came to its full circle with his intention to annex Kuwait in July 1961. Qasim's internal position weakened due to his regional and international isolation, the fact that assisted his enemies to gather support for their side, and overthrow him from power in 1963.

The Ba'th Party, which came to power in that year, succeeded in not only toppling Qasim but also mainly in crushing the strong Communist Party through organized massacres that resulted in killing thousands of Communists. Salam 'Adil and other leading cadres were at the top of the list of victims. Ironically, Qasim's fate was determined largely by the fate of the ICP and vice versa. Without the effective religious campaign that undermined the public support for Communists, the Ba'th party could not have climbed the ladder of power in 1963. Probably, Najaf's anti-Communists attitude

[555] Mortimer, E, ibid.p.313;
[556] Shaikh Al Yasin issued a *fatwa* similar to al-Hakim's one and appeared in *al-Fayha* Newspaper on 23 April 1960. See Batatu, H, p.954; Dann, U, ibid, p.302; Nakash, Y, ibid, p.135.

was the wedge that separated the Shi'a community, mainly the Shi'a political movements and Qasim's regime, and this issue was to become the point of conflict with the 'Arif's regime afterwards.

Conclusion

The July Revolution, 1958 received a widespread positive welcome by most Iraqi groups. Ensued political, social and economic steps introduced by Qasim cemented his position as a popular leader and stood him in good stead to advance ahead. Qasim, was highly admired by Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf, and he was applauded as a supporter of Islam.

Qasim's 'Iraq First's' policy and his short-lived alliance with the ICP brought him to embroilment with both Naser of Egypt and the Shah of Iran. Both Naser and the Shah distrusted Qasim, thus saved no effort to destabilize his regime. Realizing Najaf's weight within the Iraqi society, Naser and the Shah strengthened their links with Sayyed al-Hakim through religious agencies, political measures and in conjunction with financial impetus. This compounded with intensification of the conflict between Arab nationalists and Communists, hence their opposing ventures to undermine each other.

Although both Qasim and the ICP enjoyed wide support among Iraqi people (Shi'is in particular), they failed dramatically in consolidating a strong political front within Iraqi society. The ICP's dogmatic view and Qasim's rigid policies weakened any possibility of such a wide popular front emerging. This was true especially with regard to religious actors (mainly the Shi'i *marja'iyya* and the small Sunni Islamic Party) as well as other groups (small parties (the NDP, for instance) and the Kurdish movement.

It is obvious that the ICP and to a less extent Qasim belittled sensitive religious issues (most important the Personal Status Law), giving the wrong impression that secular and atheist Communism was on its way to change Iraq and to turn it upside down. Qasim's tragedy, undoubtedly, calls to mind Mosadaq's experience in Iran, where the interests of external and internal players made the decisive role in determining the regime's doom.

Like Mosadaq, Qasim was among the victims of the Cold War, and the Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq were caught between the hammer of atheist Communism and the anvil of Arab nationalism. Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq and Iran abandoned revolutionary regimes that had established genuine popular support for fear of secularism in favour of new hope. The choice in both countries however, was a new regime with bleak prospects.

Chapter V

Najaf and the 'Arif brother's phase 1963-1968

Shi'a political movement and the road to sectarianism

The February 1963 coup brought a cluster of Naserite, Ba'thist and unaffiliated military officers to power. The group, which was united around one common goal of overthrowing Qasim had divergent views, and soon underwent internal conflicts mainly over seizing power. As a result, 'Abdul Salam 'Arif dismissed the Ba'thist group and secured power for the 'Arif family until the second coming of the Ba'th in July 1968.

While 'Arif inflicted a serious defeat on the ICP, Najaf's *marja'iyya* and the new Shi'a political activities presented an acute test to his regime. The build up of Najaf's *marja'iyya* ushered in a period of Shi'a religious and political revival. Nevertheless, Sayyed al-Hakim adopted two approaches with unsettled and unclear directions: political activism and its opposite apolitical quietism. On the one hand, al-Hakim expressed no political claims for the Shi'is during the short Ba'thi period (February-November 1963), before stepping up his political criticisms of 'Arif's regime. Al-Hakim, then adopted, supported and sustained Shi'a demands for fair representation within 'Arif's government, yet his attempts bore no fruits. This approach came to an abrupt end when al-Hakim turned back to his peaceful tactic with 'Abdul Rahman 'Arif, exhibiting a friendly and less hostile approach towards him. Al-Hakim's political behavior has at large been determined by the position of those holding power in Baghdad, rather than drawing up his own long-term agenda. This reflected the deep conventional views he had held in Najaf over the previous half century.

This chapter will thus outline the political developments that took place over this period and follow the reactions of both Sayyed al-Hakim and the Da'wa party towards 'Adul Salam 'Arif, the changing course of internal and regional alliances and its impact on

Najaf's directions and options. The chapter also explores how Najaf's fluctuating decisions were bound up with regional political developments, and pay due consideration to the two major powers involved; Egypt and Iran. Again, this chapter will regard these two powers as part of the Iraqi internal game in the hope of constructing a thorough analysis of this period.

Al-Hakim between the Shi'i Ba'th and the Sunni Arif

Although they had shared the same ideological ideals (mainly the call for Arab unity) and one goal (overthrowing Qasim), the plotters of the 1963 coup were soon to split over political authority in Baghdad. The division was clear between two groups: the Ba'th party and 'Arif's military group. Whereas the majority of the Ba'th group was Shi'is and civilians, 'Arif's group was mainly from Sunni areas with military backgrounds. This clear-cut division became acute with intensifying tension between the two sides over internal and regional issues.[557]

On the eve of the February coup d'etat, the Iraqi Ba'th Regional Command included six Shi'i members out of eight, the total number of the group. In addition to 'Ali Salih al-Sa'di (a Shi'i of Kurdish Failli origin), there were Hani al-Fkaiki, Muhsin al-Shaikh Radi, Hazim Jawad, Talib Shibib and Hamid Khilkhal.[558] Moreover, Shi'is composed a good number within the new government with leading positions in the cabinet. Thus, besides their majority within the National Council of the Revolutionary Command, (the actual centre of power), the Shi'i Ba'thists gained strong representation and access to power in Baghdad. While al-Sa'di presided over the Ministry of Interior (he was also deputy premier), Hazim Jawad, Talib Shibib, Sa'dun Hamadi, Salih Kubba and Hamid Khilkhal all occupied ministerial positions.[559]

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[557] Luizard, P-J, 'the Nature of the Confrontation between the State and Marja'ism: Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim and the Ba'th', pp.90-100 in (editor) Jabar, F, *Ayatollah, Sufis and Ideologues*, ibid; Batatu, ibid, pp.1004-7; Marr, P, ibid, p.118.
[558] al-Fkaiki,H, ibid, p.352
[559] See Jabar, F, ibid, p.129; Batatu, ibid, p.1002& 1006. Also, see the composition of the N.C.R.C. in, Batatu, ibid, pp.1004-7, table, 55-1.

Immediately after the assumption of power by the new regime, al-Hakim sent his delegates to meet Shi'i members of the Ba'th Party. Al-Hakim's delegates received a good welcome from the Ba'thists, who already appreciated al-Hakim's favour during the Qasim years. It was clear that common ground and good understanding were attainable between al-Hakim and the Ba'th. Ba'thist members expected a list of political claims and demands as a compensation for al-Hakim's defiant stance against Qasim and the ICP. However, Shi'i Ba'thists (Hani al-Fkaiki, Muhsin Al Al-Shaikh Radi and Hamid Khilkhal), were surprised by the little demands made by al-Hakim's envoys. Few humble requests, 'similar to those claimed by minority groups', concerning improving the Holy Shrines, abolishing the Personal Status Law and some other minor issues were brought before the Ba'th group, indicating no sign of interest in political positions or representation in the new government.[560] Inevitably, al-Hakim realised that he was dealing with Shi'i men garbed in Ba'th dress. This explains why al-Hakim did not raise concerns regarding Shi'a representation within the new regime.

Notwithstanding, Shi'i members within the new government took a very tough attitude towards Najaf's demands in contrast to 'Arif and Ahmad Hassan al-Bakir (both Sunni), who considered the demands of both Sunni and Shi'i *'ulama*. This manifested itself soon when the Ba'th party refused to comply with the Shi'i *'ulama*'s request concerning the Personal Status Law, refusing the *marja'iyya's* demands. For his part, 'Arif was more willing to compromise, accepting the concerns of both Shi'i and Sunni conservative institutions.[561] 'Arif, who was himself a conservative religious observant with hard Sunni beliefs seems to have been less interested in adhering to political ideologies and preferred to take a moderate and pragmatic stance. 'Arif gave his word to tackle the

[560] Al-Fkaiki, H, ibid, pp.273-4; Jabar, F, ibid, p.130; Luzard, J, ibid.
[561] Al-Fkaiki, H, ibid.pp.274-5; Batatu, H, ibid, p.1018.

concerns of both Shi'i and Sunni *'ulama*, especially after the latter showed similar worries.[562]

In fact, the Personal Status Law had been one of the main issues that outraged Najafi '*ulama* against Qasim and the ICP. Barely one month after Qasim's downfall, Muhammad Rida al-Mudhafar, the Dean of *al-Fiqh College*, sent a memorandum regarding the law. In his memorandum, al-Mudhafar brought the attention of the executive committee that stands behind the law to some sensitive issues enshrined in this law. Al-Mudhafar's criticisms tackled what was regarded as controversial clauses within the law notably that dealt with women's rights and so on. The memorandum concluded with the call for abrogating this law as the interest of the *'umma* (Muslim community) requires 'if we want to create good people'.[563] To appease the fears and mounting concerns, 'Arif and al-Bakir took an initiative according to which 'provisions inconsistent with the *Shari'a* (Islamic) Law were repealed on March 18 [1963]'.[564] This unilateral decision disturbed Ba'thists who showed no sign of retreating for the sake of appeasing religious concerns.[565] Unlike Ba'thists including the Shi'i members who had expressed radical and uncompromising views, 'Arif in particular appeared a man of pragmatic politics willing to make a deal.

'Arif, Naser and the Ba'th in Iraq and Syria

Nevertheless, 'Arif distrusted the Ba'th, viewing it as a vehicle to convey Shi'a clout. In Najaf and elsewhere, some Shi'i families, probably had worked 'as a pressure group on the Ba'th to achieve traditional Shia objectives …the determination to get equality of representation with Sunnis in top governmental jobs'.[566] Apparently, the Ba'th and

[562] See Khaduri, M, *The Republican Iraq*, ibid.p.221.
[563] A memorandum addressed by al-Mudhfar to the Prime Minister, Minister of Juristic and the Head of the Committee of re-viewing the Law of Personal Status, *Al-Najaf*, No.6, March 1963.pp.1-4. Al-Mudhafar died on 1 February 1964 one year after this memorandum.
[564] Batatu, H, ibid, p.1018.
[565] Al-Fkaiki, H, ibid, pp.274-5; Batatu, H, ibid, p.1018.
[566] FO 371/ 170445, confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad October 4, 1963.

‘Arif, were engaged in covert and overt grappling over political gains. A report by the British Embassy in Baghdad stated that:

‘The Ba’thists have been busily trying to impose a Ba’thist regime, through the National Guard and the appointment of their supporters to all important posts. The pro-Naserites, on the other hand, deeply distrust the intentions of the Ba’thists. They have an important figure in President Arif, who has so far managed successfully to play a double game by maintaining a façade of leading the Government while secretly undermining it’.[567]

Whilst Ba’thists became a source of fear and distrust over their role in purging campaigns against ordinary people, ‘Arif kept himself distanced from his partners and ‘skillfully exploited the situation, and has built himself up more and more as a public figure’.[568] Adding to the lack of experience, internal conflict that raged among Ba’thists themselves made them an easy target for the trained ‘Arif. As president, ‘Arif had found himself restrained by a hidden civilian group as ‘the divorce between the power of the anonymous council and that of the executive was unlikely to make for the smooth running of the government’.[569] Thus, ‘Arif seized the chaotic disorder that impaired the Ba’th to play off one contingent of the party against the other. He leaned himself first towards the moderate group, represented by Hazim Jawad, Talib Shebib (both Shi’i) and Ahmad Hassan al-Bakir and Mundhir al-Windawi (both Sunnis). He dismissed the largest Shi’a group represented in the National Council of the Revolutionary Command, which included mainly the Shi’i group: ‘Ali Salih al-Sa’adi, Hani al-Fkaiki, Hamid Khilkhal and Muhsin Al-Shaikh Radi. The rest of the Ba’thists shortly followed this group later as both Hazim Jawad and Talib Shibib were expelled from their positions

[567] Confidential, No.37, British Embassy, Baghdad, May 17, 1963.
[568] FO371/175748, Review of the Present Iraqi Government’s First Six Months in Power, May 20, 1964.
[569] FO 371/ 170442, Confidential, British Embassy, November 16, 1963. Confidential.No.37, British Embassy, Baghdad, 17 May 1963; Confidential, British Embassy, November 16, 1963.

with al-Bakir. ‘Arif became now the absolute leader with unlimited powers to exercise.[570]

There were good reasons to assume that, ‘Arif removed the Ba’th in collaboration with Naser who shared with ‘Arif his resentment of the Ba’thists. As the Syrian Ba’th had seized power in March 1963, the two Ba’th branches became now full of confidence to realize the dream of Arab unity urging Naser to join their initiative. Unsurprisingly, Bat’thists in Syria had found themselves close to their counterparts in Iraq and far from Naser. Not only common ideology (Ba’thism and disgracing ‘Afliq) but also shared religious doctrines probably brought Ba’thists in Syria and Iraq to work in harmony.[571] It is not clear whether sectarian affiliation had played any role in widening the gap with both ‘Arif and Naser on one side, and cementing the relations between the Shi’a leaders in Iraq and Syria. Naser, who initially acceded, soon turned his back on the Ba’thist’s project, attacking first the Syrian Ba’th. Naser and the Syrian Ba’thists distrusted each other as:

‘The experience of the Baathists under the UAR was unpleasant, and there is no doubt that a considerable legacy of resentment remains on both sides. At the beginning of the union the Baathists seem to have been thought that even in spite of Naser’s declared intention to do away with all political parties, including their own, they could quietly maintain their organization in being and continue to run the country in Naser’s name. However, disillusion followed. Not only did they dislike the failure of Naser to give Syrians any positions of real influence in the union but also they seem to have regarded themselves as having been deliberately betrayed by Naser in the National Union elections of June 1959, which they probably mistakenly thought were rigged against them’.[572]

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[570] Batatu, H, ibid, p.1116; Marr, P, p.122.
[571] The Syrian Ba’th’s leadership was almost in the hands of Shi’a minority (‘Alwi and Ismailis), including Colonels Salah Jadid, Hafidh Asad and Muhammad ‘Umran. See Batatu, ibid.1015.
[572] FO 371/170160, Confidential, No.192, from the Canadian Ambassador, Cairo, UAR to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, Canada, (the Baath Party and the UAR), March 23, 1963. See also Hofstadter, D, *Egypt and Naser*, ibid, pp.105-9.

Consequently, Naser seized the opportunity of the Ba'th's weakness in Iraq to take 'Arif's side. Although the breakdown between Ba'thists and 'Arif was motivated by internal conflict, Naser in fact had his own good reasons to widen the gap between the two parties in order to reinforce his supremacy in the region. Naser not only placed his blame on the Ba'th for Syrian seceding from the United Arab Republic, but also suspected their new ambitious dream to unite with Iraq.[573]

In the course of this turmoil, al-Hakim set about on 17 October 1963 on a tour that led him to the Holy Threshold in Karbala, Kadhamayya and Samara. The tour in effect was a kind of show of force, meant to convey a political message to Baghdad. Celebrations and carnivals greeted al-Hakim in his long journey. In Baghdad, where huge meeting was held, Muhammad Hussain al-Saghir (a Shi'i poet with moderate nationalist leaning) greeted al-Hakim for his defiant stance against Qasim, calling upon him to give 'Afliq the same lesson.[574] Probably 'Afliq denounced here not merely for his secular Ba'thist ideology, but rather because of his controversial role in making a settlement for the dispute that erupted among the Ba'thists. 'Afliq, who was ousted earlier by the Syrian Ba'th, pushed hard to bring the Iraqi Ba'th branch under his control. However, he encountered vigorous resistance by 'Ali Salih al-Sa'adi and his fellow Shi'i members, who were leaning towards their counterpart in Syria.[575] 'Afliq had made his way to Baghdad in the hope of settling 'the whole business and it was followed by the news the next morning of the expulsion of Shabib, Hazim Jawad and the Iraqi Military

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[573] FO 371/ 170161, British Embassy, Baghdad, September 7, 1963; Khadduri, M, ibid, 206-7; Devlin, J, F, *The Ba'th Party, A History from its origin to 1966*, Stanford University, California-1976, pp.249-51; Abu Jaber, K S, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, History, Ideology and Organization*, Syracuse University Press, New York-1966, 1st edition,pp.47-66, 69-74.

[574] Al-'Amili, Ahmad Abu Zaid, *Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr*, *al-Sirah wal Maseerah fi Haqaeq wa Wathaeq*, Beirut- Dar al-'Arif, 1st published, vol, 1, p.451. See about al-Saghir, the previous chapter.

[575] Al-Fkaiki, H, ibid, pp.304-9; Marr, P, ibid, p, 122; Abu Jaber, K S, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party*, ibid, p.82.

Attaché'.[576] Consequently, the leadership of the Iraqi Ba'th dissolved and its rule came to its end.

'Arif, who skillfully expelled Ba'thists, made a request to al-Hakim to issue a *fatwa* against the crimes committed by the Ba'th's militia al-Haras al-Qawmi (the National Guard). The *fatwa* was probably meant to be utilized against the Ba'th in the same way as al-Hakim's *fatwa* concerning Communism was used against the ICP. Al-Hakim, however, did not acquiesce to this request, the act that underlined his resentment to conform to 'Arif's orders.[577]

Contributing to feelings of regret and betrayal that seeped into the circles of Shi'i '*ulama* as a big loser following Qasim removal, a sense of frustration spread among the Shi'a community for their low representation within the new regime. As both the ICP and Ba'th were kicked out of the arena (both voiced in divergent ways the Shi'a demands), it is probably easy to understand the discontent and dissatisfaction that prevailed afterwards.[578] Consequently, a sense of defeat and deception were not limited to Shi'i *'ulama*, but included to general Shi'a circles, notably young people who usually put their views through the main political outlets: ICP and Ba'th. No surprising, news and rumors about 'Arif's 'rigid Sunnism has infuriated the Shia' and disturbed both the Christians and the Kurds.[579] In fact, 'Arif explicitly despised Shi'is and criticized their beliefs embodying the stark opposite to the late Qasim, who publicly paid great reverence to Sayyed al-Hakim and Shi'i *'ulama*. This soon became a source of tension between Baghdad's government and the Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf. [580] In sum, there was a

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[576] FO 371/170442, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, November 16, 1963; Abu Jaber, K S, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party*, ibid, pp.81-7.

[577] Hashim, J, *Mudhakarat Wazeer Iraqi Ma' al-Bakir wa Saddam, Dhukrayat fil al-Sayasah al-Iraqayya 1967-2000*, Beirut-2003, p.99.

[578] Interview with Bahr-ul al-'Ulum, M, ibid; al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, p.228.

[579] FO 371/ 175748, Confidential, Review of the present Iraqi Government's first six months in power, May 20, 1964; Confidential No. 37, British Embassy, Baghdad, May 17, 1963.

[580] Al-Fkaiki, H, ibid, See about Qasim, p.116 compare with 'Arif, p.273.

genuine feeling that instead of improving the Shi'a political lot, the Shi'a community ended up with a new regime that was solely monopolised by one Iraqi sect.

Al-Hakim and 'Arif: motives of discord

This sense of disappointment and discontent was revealed in a memorandum sent to 'Arif's on 2 February 1964/ 18 Ramadan 1383 and signed by more than two dozens of Baghdad's *'ulama*. The memorandum, which acknowledges for the first time, specific Shi'a demands, set in unprecedented tone and sounded a clear different voice: denouncing the sectarian policies of 'Arif and the call for giving Shi'i people a fair share in the Iraqi state. To justify its claims, the memorandum pointed out the leading role of Najaf and its position within Iraq and the Islamic world and explicitly underlined Shi'a rights. The most important demand was the call for 'cultivating justice and equality among the people of this nation and refraining from any discrimination to achieve the unity of the nation'.[581] Needless to say, that al-Hakim was the main driving force behind this memorandum as his son Mahdi was one of its advocators and signatories.

'Arif, however, showed no sign of bowing to Shi'a claims and saved no efforts to break the bridges with Shi'i *'ulama*. 'Arif's next steps asserted his defiant attitude. 'Arif, for instance, issued in May 1964 the Interim Constitution. The Constitution stated in clause 41 that the president must be exclusively chosen from the holders of the Ottoman citizenship. Without a doubt, such a statement had revived the memories of Ottoman oppression and sectarianism and embittered disenfranchised Shi'a sectors. Furthermore, the new 43-nationality law that was issued in 1964 entitled the minister of interior to deprive holders of Iraqi nationality for any loyalty suspicion. Giving the intensity of the

[581] *Al-Iyman*, No, 1 & 2, 1964, pp.523-6. The memorandum sent to 'Arif in 02/02/1964.

ongoing political developments, many Shi'is notably those with Persian links, felt that they were deliberately targeted by this law, merely for sectarian reasons.[582]

'Arif turned then to the economy, targeting in particular, Shi'a financial activities in the private sector. For this purpose, 'Arif's government issued on 14 July 1964, the nationalisation laws, according to which, private banks and companies were brought under state control. Khaiyr al-Din Hasib, who had graduated at Cambridge University and had become the governor of the Central Bank of Iraq planned and implemented these laws. In fact, these laws were set as part of a new socialist program proclaimed by 'Arif's government in order to bring the Iraqi economy close to the Egyptian model in their venture to accomplish Arab unity.[583]

Obviously, 'Arif was imitating Naser's socialist laws in Egypt, which was designed to tighten the state's hold over the private sector. However, due to the fact that Shi'i merchants and businessmen were the most affected by these laws in Iraq ' as the bigger fish hurt by the July 14 laws are about 80 per cent Shia',[584] 'Arif's move was deemed as another indication of his Sunni hard line and a sectarian bias. Shi'i merchants, who had established successful business networks especially in Baghdad approached al-Hakim to issue a *fatwa* in the hope of exerting pressure on Baghdad's government to abandon the nationalisation orders.

Nevertheless, a great majority of the Shi'i community were not hurt by these laws; only Shi'i businessmen and some '*ulama* were irritated by them as businessmen constitute the mainstay of *Khums* contributors to the *marja'iyya* in Najaf. It is still important however to state that Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf and even some Sunni scholars denounced these laws, grounding their announcement on a religious basis and arguing that these

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[582] Ibrahim, F, *al-Taefayya wal Sayasah fi al-'Alim al-'Arabi.Namodhaj al-Shi'ifi al-Iraq*. Cairo-1996, ibid, p.297.

[583] FO 371/ 175766, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad July 25, 1964; Sluglett & Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, ibid.p.101.

[584] FO 371/ 175766, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad July 25, 1964. See also al-Azri, A, *Mushkilat al-Hukam fi al-Iraq*, ibid, pp.273-9.

decrees ‘ could not be reconciled with the various Quranic passages normally cited as justifications of the doctrine of Arab socialism’.[585] Seriously offended by ‘Arif’s nationalisation laws, al-Hakim expressed his anger on 22 July when a fierce statement was publicized on behalf of him in Kadhamayya.[586] The statement criticised the nationalisation orders but again ‘Arif showed no sign of reconciliation.

Clearly, al-Hakim was aware of the connections between ‘Arif’s decrees and Naser‘s socialist policies. Naser, who had turned his direction slightly towards the Soviet Union since the end of 1963, alleviated his actions towards the Egyptian Communists and adopted, among other things, some socialist measures. For this end, he initiated an ambitious socialist plan to reform the Egyptian economy. Even more, Naser enjoined the al-Azhar to advocate these policies as consistent with Islamic beliefs. In this regard, Amin Huwaidi, the Ambassador of the UAR, sent Sayyed al-Hakim an invitation to attend a conference organized by the al-Azhar, which was dedicated to explore relationship between Islam and socialism. In his retort, al-Hakim not only declined the invitation but also criticised both Naser and the al-Azhar. Al-Hakim openly played down the conference, which endeavors, as al-Hakim put it ‘to propose for Muslims new ideals better than the ones revealed in Islam’. He fiercely discarded the al-Azhar’s claim that socialism conforms to Islamic beliefs. This claim, according to al-Hakim, is a form of erred *ijtihad* based on personal whims and intentions.[587]

Najaf’s defiant position to Baghdad over the Kurdish question had been another source of discord. This question undoubtedly contributed in engulfing the gab between al-Hakim and ‘Arif’s government. ‘After more than a year of truce, fighting broke out in

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[585] Ibid; FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad August 8, 1964.
[586] FO 371/ 175766, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad July 25, 1964; Ibrahim, F, ibid, p.296.
[587] See the full text of this letter in, al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam al-Sayyed Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadrfi Thakerat al-Iraq*, Baghdad, 2004, pp.674-5.

April 1965 between Kurdish rebels and Government forces'.[588] As fighting became intense with little hope of a quick victory, 'Arif resorted to air attacks to crush the Kurdish resistance. At the same time, 'Arif moved towards religious '*ulama* so as to obtain *fatwas* that sanction his military campaign against the Kurds. For this purpose, his government organized the first Islamic conference in July 1965.[589] Al-Hakim, however, condemned such attempts and vehemently expressed his views against Baghdad's policies in this regard. In fact, Barazani had constructed good contacts with Najaf and Mahdi al-Hakim, Muhammad Bah-rul al-'Uum, Murtada al-'Askari and 'Abdul Hadi Al-Hakim were designated by Sayyed al-Hakim to coordinate with Kurds and the Kurdish leader, Mulah Mustafa al-Barazani.[590] Evidently, al-Hakim defended Kurds as an oppressed community and victims of a sectarian regime. It was telling that Muhammad Baqir, al-Hakim's other son, made a statement at the end of 1964, denouncing 'the sectarian discrimination that both Kurds and Shi'is facing in the social side, and calling upon Iraqi government to bring an immediate end to this inadequacy through fulfilling justice and social equity among Muslims without any prejudice'.[591] However, it is appropriate to see the deterioration of relationships between 'Arif's regime and Najaf's *marja'iyya* in the light of a new breakdown between Iraq and Iran due to the latter's role in supplying Kurds with weapons and safe havens, the act that enraged 'Arif.[592] Bearing this in mind and considering that a decisive victory over the Kurds had vanished, 'Arif, no wonder, placed his blame on al-Hakim and the Shah of Iran, who both kept good relations with Kurds. For this reason, 'Arif's government arrested one of al-Hakim's assistants on 30 July 1964, for suspecting him of 'being the

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[588] FO 371/ 180805, No.1, Confidential, Iraq: Annual Review for 1964, January 6, 1965; FO 371/ 180805, No.1, Confidential, Iraq: Annual Review for 1965, January 2, 1966
[589] FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, July 11, 1964; FO 371/ 180841, confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, July 16, 1965.
[590] See al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam al-Sayyed Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.286-8.
[591] *Al-Adhwa*, No, 4, 1964, pp.145-8.
[592] FO 371/ 180805, No.1, Confidential, Iraq: Annual Review for 1965, January 2, 1966.

main contact point between the Shias and representatives of Mulla Mustafa'.[593] Indeed, 'Arif had good reason to suspect 'a much greater prospect … of Shia-Kurdish co-operation if trouble breaks out again either in the North or the South'.[594]

Renouncing denominational and sectarian policies targeting the Shi'a community became a recurring theme brought out by Shi'i '*ulama* here and there. According to *al-Adhwa*, sectarianism remains persistant and Shi'i people are still experiencing this sectarian bias in the form of intellectual and social oppression. *Al-Adhwa* criticises those people who excommunicate Shi'i Muslims, calling them to 'pay attention to Shaltut's *fatwa*.[595] Again, this call resounded clearly and openly by *al-Hayae al-'Almayya fi al-Najaf al-Ashraf* (the Association of Scholars in Honored Najaf) in February 1964 during a religious festival held in Najaf. The Association highlighted the situation of Shi'i people in Iraq and their grievances 'they encounter in all fields, where the state controls everything leaving, for example, no role in education and endowments, for the *Ja'fari madhhab* (doctrine) which is treated in appaling way'.[596] When Tahir Yahya, the then Prime Minister visited Sayyed al-Hakim on 19 March 1964, al-Hakim himself raised these concerns, singling out the 'new sectarian attitude that recently infiltrated within Iraqi society, posing the most hazardous threat for Iraq'.[597]

Shi'i *'ulama*, poets and preachers began a campaign of attacking what they considered a new sectarian tendency that was poisoning the government institutions, trying to deprive Shi'i people their due rights.[598] This cry, however, was blended for the first with the emerging Iraqi Shi'i identity, emphasizing more on the Shi'i role in building the new Iraqi state. In retrospect of the 1920 Iraqi Revolution, a Shi'i editor highlights a contradiction between the sacrifices made by Shi'i rebels to establish the new Iraqi state

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[593] FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, August 8, 1964.
[594] FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, July 11, 1964.
[595] *Al-Adhwa*, No,3, pp.97-104 & No,4.pp.145-52. See the previous chapter
[596] *Al-Adhwa*, No,6-7.pp.97-104
[597] *Al-Iyman*, ibid, p.529; *Al-Adhwa*, No, 8-9, pp.289-90
[598] See for example, *Al-Adhwa*, No.6-7, 1965, pp.251-5.

and their current miserable situation where only some Iraqis were made privileged over others because of a sectarian, tribal and racial basis. The writer continues:

'Courageous and crucial standings showed by the Euphrates and the lower south (Shi'is), are the bright pages of Iraqi history. Unluckily, these people, who constitute the majority of this nation, are denied of their rights, abused and portrayed in bad descriptions'.[599]

For both Shi'i faithful and secularists, the Iraqi Revolution of 1920 had come to appear as a true moment of new Iraqi history that coincided with betrayal and anguish caused by authoritative Sunni elites. 'Arif's government seems to have triggered feelings of betrayal among Shi'is, the sense that had been prevailing during the monarchy era as lip service paid to address Shi'a calls and demands. This climate made al-Hakim now more determined to search for a new political route that could find a solution to the Shi'a dilemma.

Al-Hakim and *Jama'at al-'Ulama*: awakening Shi'a masses

There emerged after the 'Arif's coup of November 1963 for the first time a new phenomenon; that is the consolidation of Shi'a identity in Baghdad and the southern regions of Iraq. It is true to say that until 1963, the main bulk of Shi'a activities were concentrated in Najaf and Karbala. Thus, the regeneration of sectarian identity among Shi'i people in Baghdad and the southern areas had been profoundly associated with the intensity of political disputes between Najaf and Baghdad.

Al-Hakim perceived the need to shift Shi'i political activities to Baghdad where decisions are made and politicians and political groups could meet. He embarked on making the Shi'a voice heard in the capital rather than keeping it confined to Najaf's cultural salons and literature magazines. For this purpose, al-Hakim, therefore, assigned a group of Shi'i '*ulama* residing in Baghdad to lead a new political initiative. Calling itself *Jama'at al-'Ulama fi Baghdad wa al-Kadhamayya* (the Association of '*ulama* in Baghdad and Kadhamayya), this group included Sayyed Murtada al-'Askari, Sayyed

[599] *Al-Iyman*, No, 7 & 8 April-May, 1964, pp.1-8.

Mahdi, one of the most politically active of al-Hakim's sons, Sayyed Muhammad al-Haydari, Shaikh 'Ali al-Saghir, Shaikh Muhammad Hassan Al Yasin and Sayyed Hadi al-Hakim. The group set about in conducting and implementing al-Hakim's instructions respecting political issues as well as dictating usual religious and social affairs. Obviously, al-Hakim accorded this group a free hand to manage arising problems though his word was sought and requested concerning decisive political directions. Nevertheless, the group was commissioned with a vital job; promoting religious activities (festivals, celebrations and *Muharam* commemorations) in order to establish a good contact with Shi'a communities in Baghdad's districts.[600]

The beginning of the 1964 witnessed the early signs of impatience among Shi'i '*ulama* and:

'Protest meetings were held in various Shi'i centres from April onwards, at which the Government were accused of discrimination. On 1 July Shi'is attending the Ashura celebrations held annually in Karbala in honor of Husain's martyrdom chanted religious poems which poured abuse on President Arif by inference, though he was not actually referred to by name'.[601]

Shi'a *mumins* (preachers) began an organized campaign of attacking 'Arif, particularly during *'Ashura*, where Shi'i sentiments reach their peak. Clearly, *'Ashura* processions have been transformed into political venue at the behest of al-Hakim himself to convey messages to the Iraqi government. A report had noted that:

'On the eve of the Tenth day…there was an air of great expectation in the Shia quarters here as the Husseiniyyas began… the proceedings were not limited to Kadhimain; one report had it that the people from Al Thawra and al Shula townships, the slummy suburbs created by Qasim for re-housing *sarifa* dwellers, were encouraged by the police not to process in their vast numbers to Kadhimain, so had to enact their Husseiniyyas locally. They had help in laying these on more

[600] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, ibid, pp.145-6; al-Moman, 'A, ibid, p.67.
[601] FO 370/ 2796, Confidential, the Political Influence of the Shi'is in Iraq, 1 April 1965.

professionally than usual from Imams sent up for the purpose by the religious hierarchy in Najaf'.[602]

Shi'i '*ulama* escalated their verbal attacks against 'Arif, who became the new Yazid of Iraq:

''Arif was called 'the grandson of Yazid'…;' the greatest infidel of them all'; the discriminator; ... the destroyer of Islam through incomprehension…whenever a recitor produced a particularly choice epithet, his friends in the procession would point to the nearest policeman or soldier, shouting 'Go and tell that to Arif, from the Shia'.[603]

Shi'i faithful seems to have utilized every opportunity to express their new identity in the face of 'Arif's regime. It should be stressed, however, that the Iranian government had played their part in fanning the fire of sectarian division. Dr.Pirasteh, the then Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad may have played this role well, aggravating the problems rather than healing the wounds. Pirasteh's role, for instance, was noticed during the organized celebration that took place in 1964 for the reception of the 'Golden Tomb' sent to Karbala from Iran. The tomb, which was endowed and funded by some wealthy Iranian people for 'Abbas holy grave (a half brother to Imam Hussain who was killed in the Battle of Karbala and named by Shi'i as *Qamar Bani Hashim*), was received by Dr. Pirasteh at the Iraqi-Iranian border. From there the vehicles had crossed Baghdad with a huge number of Shi'is who were chanting 'we want *hukm ja'fariyy* (Shi'a rule). It was obvious that the whole procession was organization by the Iranian Officials, 'who clearly intended to remind the authorities of the growing corporate sense, transcending national frontiers, of the Shia, and the dissatisfaction of both Iranian and Iraqi Shia at the treatment handed out to them in Iraq'.[604]

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602 FO 371/ 175755, Confidential from S.L. Egerton to M.St.E.Purton, British Embassy, Baghdad, May 29, 1964.
603 FO 371/ 175749 Confidential, British Embassy, July 3, 1964.
604 Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, 26 November 1965.

From al-Hakim part, the task was assigned to Ibrahim al-Yazdi (al-Hakim's son in law) who had kept good links with the Shah's government.[605] Immediately after this planned march, Dr.Pirasteh

'was withdrawn in July as a result of a deterioration in Iran-Iraq relations, for which his own attitude was partly responsible, and returned to his post in February 1965 less belligerent than on first arrival in Baghdad'.[606]

Apparently, al-Hakim had two goals; one short term and the second for long term. While he had thought of these popular activities (*Muharam* processions, for instance) as a direct and active way of energising Shi'a identity, al-Hakim encouraged, supported and funded Sayyed Murtada al-'Askari in founding religious schools for girls and boys as well as other forms of religious institutions (libraries, charity associations and Hussainaya, etc) as part of his long term project that was designed to construct a highly educated Shi'a elite. Al-'Askari, who recently presided over the Da'wa after al-Sadr's withdrawal seems to have worked hard to advance al-Hakim's ambitious plan. For this purpose, he founded private schools in Baghdad, Kadhamayya, Basrah, Hilla, Diwanayya and Numana'yya (Kut).[607] Most importantly, however, he created in 1964 *the College of Usul al-Din* (the College of Religion's Principles) in Baghdad, which was built on the line of *Kulayat al-Fiqh* in Najaf. The college was staffed with professional academic professors and lecturers who graduated from Baghdad, Cairo and even England. New curriculua were introduced to the College, where attention was paid to modern approaches and methodologies in education. Despite the fact that religious sciences were still considered the main syllabi of the new College, a monitoring board offered modern social and humanitarian courses. Al-Sadr proposed and introduced new textbooks, couched in clear and simple language. In addition to *usul al-Fiqh* (which is

[605] *Al-Iyman*, No, 1-2, 1964, p.527.
[606] FO 370/ 2796, Confidential, the Political Influence of the Shi'is in Iraq, 1 April 1965.
[607] About Murtadha 'al-'Askari, see al-Khirsan, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, ibid, pp.73-7 & 119; Jabar, F, ibid, p.97, table 4.2, p.103.

considered as an essential pillar of *hawza* studies), al-Sadr composed two other books; one treated the Quranic sciences and the other dealt with Islamic economy. Despite the fact that propagating and advocating Islamic norms in the face of western cultural encroachment was a major aim behind establishing this College, it was obvious that creating Shi'a elite was the main goal.[608]

Whereas the *College of Usul al-Din* had been designed primarily to breed a qualified elite that could stand up to the challenge imposed by secular trends (especially Communism), al-Hakim now embarked on preparing new Shi'i generation whose task was to focus on politics and professional sciences with one goal in mind: raising a group of professional politicians for the future to engage in the Iraqi political process. Al-Hakim supported in this regard the ambitious project of Kufa University. This stillborn project was meant to provide the Shi'a community with high expertise and professionals who would be capable to fulfill leading roles. Al-Hakim might have come to realise the lack of professional politicians among the Shi'a community similar to that generation under the monarchy such as Fadil al-Jamali, Sa'ad Salih, al-Shibibi and al-'Azri and the like.

The peculiarity about the Kufa University project was that it came from a group of Shi'i secular professionals and businessmen who had undergone 'Arif's sectarian policies. Men like Muhammad Makayya (an architect), Kadhim Shuber (doctor) and Hussain al-Shakeri (a wealthy Najafi businessman) proffered the main design and plan for this University with one intended purpose: preparing civil and professional educated men who could carry out the task of political reform in the future. Al-Hakim nominated his son Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim to join the group as Muhammad Taqi was well known form his academic and intellectual interests. The group received money, support and encouragement froo wealthy Shi'is, who apparently felt the weight of 'Arif policies.

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608 *Dalil Kulaiyat Usul al-Din*, Baghdad-1967-8, p.7, pp.24-5 & pp.46-7; al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam al-Sayyed Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.319-21.

The project did not come to life as the second Ba'th regime put it to an abrupt end soon after 1968.[609] The importance of this project, however, lies in the fact that it brought together the efforts of both secular and religious activists within the Shi'a community to promote the conditions of Shi'i people. This joint project undoubtedly reflected, among other things, the growing feelings of exclusion and deprivation of both Shi'i secular and religious trends.

Al-Hakim and the Da'wa: new phase

The Da'wa party had suffered no set back as a result of al-Sadr's withdrawal. This was due mainly to the fact that al-Sadr's decision was private and kept out of the public, leaving a minimum impact on Da'wa fans and supporters. This was also made possible thanks to Murtada al-'Askari, the new leader who took the reign of the Da'wa party. Al-'Askari's reputation as a prolific scholar empowered him to extend the party's political activities among the Shi'a community in Baghdad, linking them to Sayyed al-Hakim in Najaf. Being at the same time the main *Wakil* (agent or representative) of al-Hakim in Baghdad and the head of the Da'wa had made al-'Askari the most powerful Shi'a religious figure in Baghdad particularly with the relative freedom he enjoyed at the time.

Although no official accord was adhered to by Shi'i '*ulama* and the Da'wa party members, the latter were certainly beneficiaries of al-Hakim's religious campaign. Alienated religious feelings resulted from political tension between Najaf and 'Arif emboldened the Da'wa in its political activities notably in Baghdad. As both the ICP and the Ba'th party became under the regime's surveillance, the Da'wa party utilized this opportunity to strengthen and consolidate its networks inside the campuses of Baghdad University to recruit new Shi'i faithful. Further to religious motivations,

[609] About Kufa University project, see al-Amili, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.81-3; al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.322-5.

ideological and political developments also contributed in stimulating the Shi'a Islamic activities.

Personal disputes and tensions affected the Da'wa; however the movement endured partially thanks to the fact that feelings of discontent with Baghdad's regime triumphed over Shi'a inter-community tensions. Al-Sadr also continued to use his good interference for the benefit of the Da'wa. Thanks to (Abu Hassan) Hadi al-Sibaiti, the Da'wa party appeared during this period to have been close in its structure to any other organized party, clandestinely set and faithful behind its leadership. This became more obvious after al-'Askari's sudden withdrawal from the Da'wa, leaving an extensive space for the civil contingent to conduct their political maneuvers.[610]

Although the Da'wa literature was obviously Shi'a (or precisely for this reason), the party attracted new Shi'i members especially in Baghdad, which overrode Najaf for the first time. Universities, colleges and secondary schools had been centres of recruiting Shi'i faithful, who were increasingly incensed by 'Arif's policies. *Husseinayyat* and libraries were good points of contacts, where new members received religious directions and political orientation. As al-Hakim and his agents in *Jama'at al-'Ulama* established new mosques, *Husseinayyat* and libraries to cover the needs of new districts of Baghdad; the Da'wa party extended its activities to reach these areas.[611] Strengthening its nucleuses, the Da'wa now moved with clear confidence to nominate its own list of candidates for the student election in 1964-65.[612] Furthermore, this act was a sign of expanding influence mainly among Shi'a community in Baghdad, which became more conscious of 'Arif policies.

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[610] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid, pp,135-6.

[611] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid, pp.132-3; Jabar, F , ibid, pp.138-9.

[612] 'Alayan, 'A, provides good list of Shi'a merchant families, mainly in Baghdad in his book *al-Shi'a wal Dawlah al-Iraqayya al-Hadeetha, al-Waqi' al-Sayasi wal Ajtima' wal Iqtisadi 1914-1958*, Beirut-2005, pp.443-58. See also, Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid, p.119; Ibrahim, F, ibid, pp, 200-1; Jabar, F, ibid, p.139.

The main activities shifted now to concentrate in Kadhamayya, al-Karadah and the new slum town al-Thawra. Gradually, al-Karadah took the leading position, replacing Najaf as the former became a hub of political activities. Contrary to Najaf, which had always witnessed a kind of dispute over the *marja'iyya*, affecting directly imitators, al-Karadah appeared united behind Najaf's *marja'iyya*. Also important to notice is that al-Karadah had contained the cornerstone of the merchant class in the Shi'a community as well as a good number of highly educated people, both of them suffered grave discrimination within the government institutions in Baghdad.[613]

Again, clear distinction should be made between the activities of *Jama'at al-'Ulama* and the Da'wa. Apparently, there had been a covert conflict between al-Hakim and *Jama'at al-'Ulama* from one side and the Da'wa on the other over the proper means and ways that should be pursued in their coordinated action. Whereas the Da'wa followed al-Hakim's literal instructions during Qasim's era, the Da'wa now embarked on its own approach, adhering to a gradual planned stages and set platform. Conversely, during the conflict with 'Arif, the Da'wa carried a peaceful course, casting aside any unorganized action requested by Shi'i *'ulama*. The Da'wa leadership, therefore, seems to have been reluctant to comply with al-Hakim's orders respecting Baghdad, reporting that the party is unfledged to engage in such untimely confrontation. For the Da'wa, time was not ripe and priority thus must be given first and most to spread the message among Shi'a faithful.[614]

Disagreements over orders and methods were to cause a split with al-Hakim, who soon came to realise this rift. Al-Hakim first expressed his discontent towards the Da'wa's attitude. This reaction was put across after the noncompliant line showed by Da'wa leaders to take part in a demonstration against 'Arif.[615] This developed into an

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[613] Interview with Falah Sharif, 26/01/2004-London. Sharif is a Najafi resident of al-Karadah district. See also, al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid.139.
[614] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam*, ibid, p.271; idem, *Hizb*, ibid.p.147.
[615] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam*, ibid, p.272.

unfriendly stance when al-Hakim turned from supporting the Da'wa to a more cautious attitude. As the Da'wa leadership had showed a bold stance, and seemed set to proceed in its own way, al-Hakim went further to declare a decree, according to which he prohibited any affiliation with any party (including religious parties, where leadership is unclear and undefined). In a *fatwa* issued in 1388/ 1967, al-Hakim stated overtly that unconcealed leadership is an essential requirement to join a party. According to al-Hakim, 'membership is permissible as long as *al-Ghayat* (goals) are known and common'.[616] Al-Hakim's *fatwa*, however, is not to be interpreted as a sign of a complete break with the Da'wa, rather a form of disavowing its new independent line. Indeed, while al-Hakim was willing to bring the Da'wa under his supervision, the Da'wa insisted more on precedence of its political objectives, transgressing the orders of the *marja'i al-taqlid*. This was not the end of the story however.

Al-Hakim, who was aware of the Da'wa's activities, shortly accelerated his pressure. Al-Hakim thus began to criticize the Da'wa directly, issuing in 1969 an unsparing statement, in which he called upon the Da'wa's members to quit their links with the party. In this statement/*fatwa,* al-Hakim put it clearly, 'that membership of this party means being servant of unknown agencies'.[617] This *fatwa* however seems to have been forged by some close assistants of al-Hakim, who opposed the Da'wa and were unsatisfied with its line or at best, a result of pressure exerted on al-Hakim himself to bring down the Da'wa.

Surprisingly enough, this increasing rift between al-Hakim and the Da'wa passed unnoticed by 'Arif's government. According to Baghdad's government, Shi'a activities were steered and dictated by al-Hakim himself and all worked together in harmony for one goal: conspiring for seizing power in order to establish an Islamic state.

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[616] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamayya*, pp.628-9, document 3 & 4.See also al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, pp.279-81.

[617] Unpublished document (personal collection). The *fatwa* dated on 10 Safar 1389/ 1969.

Probably, the first leaks about the Da'wa and its connection with al-Hakim were reported by some Egyptian sources in Baghdad to 'Arif's intelligence services. This is obvious as the first references to the Da'wa came under the title of the Fatimid Party. The Egyptians, who had successfully made close contact and friendly ties with both Shi'i nationalists and '*ulama* in Najaf, seemed to have had good picture of Shi'a political activism taking place in Najaf and elsewhere. This leak was not surprising in a small city like Najaf, where rumors and stories passed on among people. As Egyptians were accustomed to call Shi'is Fatimids, it is probably true to assume that Fatimid was nothing more than another name of the nascent Da'wa Party.[618] In fact, 'Arif's intelligence had no access or information on the Da'wa, and Egyptians were certainly the main channel of this intelligence. Surely, the Da'wa's name was still less known even among Shi'i activists themselves, the fact that explains the Fatimid logo denoted by the Egyptians sources. Until recent days, however, researchers and Shi'i activists tend to discard such claim, arguing that there was not a party or movement under this name, accusing 'Arif of fabricating this allegation.[619]

Shi'a Islamists: identity and outlook

During this period, Shi'a Islamist movements molded and forged a new local identity with visible Shi'i orientation. Realising the weight of the Sunni-Shi'a split that had been present in Iraq, Hashimi Kings in Baghdad in fact endeavored to minimize the effects of this schism on Iraqi society. With 'Arif, however, the sectarian division became sharp, acute and clear. This also affected the genre of Shi'a movement's discourse, which came now to accentuate more its sectarian identity. Arguably, 'Arif's pro-Sunni policy had been the main drive that sustained and shaped the Shi'a movement, providing it with life, cause and incentives.

[618] FO 371/175749, British Embassy, Baghdad to Foreign Office, London, July 31, 1964.
[619] See al-Hakim, M, *Mudhekarat*, Tehran-1984, p.76; Jabar, F, ibid.pp.140-1; al-Bayati, H, *Shi'at al-Iraq bayna al-Taefayya wal Shubihat*, London-1997, pp.229-36; al-Momin, 'A, ibid d, p.51.

Unlike al-Hakim who perceived an Iraqi national program with a parliamentary system, the Da'wa espoused an all-embracing pan-Islamist agenda inspiring all Muslims regardless of their nations. As stated earlier, the ideology of the Da'wa in its initial phase had been affected and influenced by its exposure to Sunni political literature of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb al-Tahrir; hence designed to satisfy the needs of all Muslims. Nonetheless, the Da'wa had to recourse to Shi'a discourse as a reaction to 'Arif's sectarian tendency in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Baghdad's regime. In one of its statements, the Da'wa states that 'Arif failed to win the people's hearts:

'In spite of his propaganda and the attempt made by him to force the Iraqis to support his regime, he has been unsuccessful, because the Iraqi people know who Arif is, and have not forgotten the Field –Marshal's disgraceful past, both recent and distant. He is factionalist No. 1 in Iraq, enemy No. 1 of the unity of the Iraqi people, tyrannous, cruel, bloody and sacrilegious'.[620]

The statement goes further to refer to Shi'i people who sacrificed their lives in the 1920 Iraqi Revolution and how this was exploited by 'Arif sectarian rule.[621]

In fact, both al-Hakim and the Da'wa had echoed the Shi'a voice, sharing denouncements for 'Arif's sectarian policy, though they had divergent outlooks: Al-Hakim always advocated his claim of one Iraqi state with fair representation for all communities, whilst the Da'wa almost always kept a vivid pan-Islamism within its discourse.

In the face of this mounting Shi'a protest, 'Arif launched a propaganda campaign against the Shi'a movement. 'Arif painted the Shi'a movement as a fifth column, agents of Iran and Britain, who work to prompt a denominational sense among the Iraqi Shi'is for the interests of foreign governments to impair Iraqi unity. It should be noted that

[620] FO 371/180813, Communiqué from the Fatimid Party, 9, July 1965.
[621] FO 371/180813, Communiqué from the Fatimid Part. ibid.

Iraqi Communists who openly condemned al-Hakim and other Shi'i activists for serving the Shah's agenda as well as the interests of imperial British were the first ever group who set this charge in motion.[622] Like their counterparts in Iran, Iraqi Communists particularly those in Najaf were accustomed to link between Shi'i '*ulama* as a 'reactionary group' and Britain as a chief colonial power operating in the Middle East.[623]

With respect to Iran, al-Hakim's adversaries in effect had always raised this allegation. Starting from Iraqi Communists, 'Arif and Ba'thists afterwards, they all accused al-Hakim of being an agent to Iran and had a special relationship with the Shah's regime serving the latter's agenda rather than Iraq's interests. As we shall see, even some Shi'i '*ulama* like Al al-Baghdadi in Najaf and Al al-Khalisi in Kadhamayya made these claims against al-Hakim. These allegations, however, must be brought under careful scrutiny with consideration for various regional factors that were in motion, political developments in Iraq as well as al-Hakim's inner circle.

Najaf and regional politics: Al-Hakim and the Shah versus 'Arif and Naser

As observed in previous chapters, Iraq's relationship with Iran had almost always affected its internal politics and vise versa. This became more obvious with the intensifying regional dispute between the two states over political hegemony in the Gulf in particular. No doubt, Iran and Iraq had succeeded in easing the tension between them

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[622] Interview with Faeq al-Shaikh 'Ali (an independent politician and lawyer from Najaf), London- 27-10-2010. During their heyday, Najafi Communists were chanting against Al-Hakim: *Sabeen Alif Dollar Jawa 'Amamta* (seventy thousand dollars underneath his turban). Al-Khirsan, S, ibid, p.402

[623] According to the Shah twin sister, Princes Ashraf Pahlavi, there was a jock in Persia states 'that if you picked up a clergyman's beard, you would see the words' Made in England' stamped on the other side'. Cited in, Curtis, M, *Secret Affairs, Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam*, 2010, p.55; Al-'Alawi, Hadi, *Fi al-Dinw al Turath*, ibid.pp.129-33.

by the mid 1950s, owing to the mutual understanding resulted from signing the Baghdad Pact.

In fact, the presences of a good number of Persian '*ulama* living notably in the holy cities often brought some serious test to this precarious relationship. This gives a partial explanations for why most Persian '*ulama* lost their appetite for Iraqi politics since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1920. Notwithstanding, Najaf's '*ulama* had always been caught over political disputes between the two states and in many occasions were vulnerable to criticisms from the Sunni politicians in Baghdad.

Contrary to Qasim's regime, and due to various internal and external factors, 'Arif rested part of his legitimacy on his special and close attachment with Naser. Adding to the common ideological tenets (Arab nationalism), Iraq and Egypt came close by virtue of their enmity to the Shah. Meanwhile, al-Hakim's relations with both Naser and Shah were brought to a real test. While Shah Muhammad Rida had a keen interest in promoting his relationship with al-Hakim, Naser was less passionate in continuing this course. Thus, on the contrary to Qasim's era, where regular communications were maintained between Cairo and Najaf, the former only paid lip service, if any, to Najaf's views between 1963 and 1968. As Brunner correctly observed:

'The struggle against Communism alone did not suffice as a basis for mutual understanding between the Azhar as an institution and the Shiite *'ulama*, especially when the threat from their common enemy no longer existed, or at least not in its initial gravity, and when other political priorities had taken its place. The Azhar's breaking with Najaf as a result of a change in Egyptian foreign policy was an open admission that even the brief accommodation of 1958-59 had merely been a matter of expediency dictated by immediate events.'[624]

Indeed, Naser needed al-Hakim's support in his campaign to oust Qasim, and replace him with a new friendly regime in Baghdad. Once this task was achieved, Naser paid no consideration to the Iraqi Shi'a front. Surely, political developments on the ground

[624] Brunner, R, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century*, ibid, pp.319-20.

transformed the balance in ‘Arif’s favor, at the expense of the Shah. This in turn, affected al-Hakim’s vulnerable position and brought him under pressures from Baghdad’s government.

After 1963, Naser’s interest in the Shi’a factor seems to have only shifted from Iraq to Iran rather than ceased. While al-Hakim’s special relationship with Naser gradually retreated in its significance as Naser became less concerned with Iraq, the latter pursued a similar tactic with regard to Shi’i ‘*ulama* in Iran to induce them to his side. No wonder, Naser was to focus on the Iranian front with one goal in mind: inflaming Shi’i ‘*ulama* in order to weaken if not dethroning the Shah’s regime. For this end, Naser did not confine his contacts to Shi’i ‘*ulama* (through the al-Azhar and *Dar al-Taqrib*) but also expanded them to cover other Iranian opposition groups. Thus, Naser dispatched his men to organize meetings and attend conferences for Iranian activists in European countries. Even more, Naser hosted a permanent office for the opposition groups in Cairo, extended the coverage of the Persian-speaking radio broadcasted from Cairo, funded Iranian opposition activities with money, provided its men with Egyptian passports to facilitate their movement and even supplied them with weapons.[625]

Egyptian intelligence coordinated its activities especially with the Iranian Liberation Movement, headed by Sayyed Mahmood al-Talaqani through its representative in Cairo, Ibrahim al-Yazdi.[626] Although the Iranian Liberation Movement approached the Persian ‘*ulama* residing in Iran (Shara’t Madari, Khomeini and Milani), it realised the importance of agitating the great Ayatollah in Najaf. In this regard, the ILM drafted a plan, according to which Ibrahim al-Yazdi was assigned with the task of opening a channel with Sayyed Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, the second recognized Ayatollah in Najaf. Al-Khoei was singled out as the main channel of contact probably for three reasons: he

[625] Al-Dib, F, *Naser wa Thawrat Iran*, Cairo-2000, pp.16-51.

[626] Ibrahim al-Yazdi, who became a foreign Minster after the Iranian Revolution, is not to be confused with al-Hakim son-in-law Ibrahim al-Yazdi.

was the most recognized *mujtahid* after al-Hakim, his wide influence upon other Persian ‘*ulama* both in Najaf and inside Iran and lastly his opposition to the Shah.

Al-Yazdi, who had written a long report to the Egyptian intelligence, propounded that good links with al-Khoei, will certainly facilitate the activities of the Iranian opposition through establishing a departure point in Najaf to work from. The report also suggested that it would be possible to gain great benefit from al-Khoei’s scholastic reputation to choose a group of supporters in Najaf to assist the Iranian opposition.[627]

Al-Khoei (known for his apolitical approach) had issued in 1964 a statement that purposely attacked the Shah and his leaning policies towards Israel. Interestingly, al-Khoei’s statement specifically underlined the issues raised by the Iranian opposition’s report particularly those addressing Iran’s relation with Israel; the major point of conflict between the Shah and Naser. This was followed by another ‘call addressed in particular to the ‘*ulama* in Iran. The call too reiterated the same concerns, emphasising that Iran had been transformed into a base for enemies, where foreigners serve the interests of other states. The call aptly attacked the Shah, linking him to Israel. Shortly after that, another statement, issued now by a group called *al-Hayae al-‘Alalmayya fi al-Najaf al-Ashraf* (the Association of Scholars in Honored Najaf). The Association fiercely attacked the Shah, calling for non-cooperation with his regime as he continued suppressing the Iranian people. The statement was accompanied and marked by al-Khoei *fatwa*, in which he declared that confronting the Shah is an equivalent to the jihad with Imam Hussain against his enemies.[628] The timing of these statements (as well as its contents) raises some questions over its authenticity and motives behind them. Although these statements contradict al-Khoei’s conventional line of thought, they seem to have

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[627] S Khisroshahi, H, *Haqeeqat ‘Alaqat ‘Abdul Naser wal Thawra al-Islamayya fi Iran*, n.p, 2003, pp.179-81.

[628] See the full text of these statements in *al-Mosem*. A special issue dedicated to al-Khoei life and works, 1993, pp.234-240.

been issued either as a response to the ILM pressure or under the influence of its incentives.

Seemingly, al-Hakim had paid no attention to this geopolitical transformation, hence continued conducting his normal political and religious business according to his traditional line. Al-Hakim, for instance, might have offended Naser when he sent him a telegraph in 1966 concerning Sayyed Qutib, a leading ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Hakim implicitly rejected the official charges made against Qutib (attempting to overthrow Naser's regime) and called Naser to free him from prison.[629] Naser, however, paid no attention to al-Hakim's plea and executed Qutib afterwards. Perhaps, this telegraph caused the final divorce between Naser and al-Hakim, as less contact can be discerned between the two sides afterwards. 'Arif was capable to heighten his political campaign against Najaf's '*ulama* because of this regional shift, benefiting from this political change to deepen the Shi'a political isolation.

'Arif and *marja'iyya*: using all weapons

Unlike his predecessor Qasim, 'Arif carried on his internal policies supported by the Egyptian government and sustained less obstacles on the regional arena. Thus, part of the anti-Shi'ism that characterised 'Arif's personal attitude and policies might be understood in the light of his antagonism with the Shah, the main neighbor rival. From the outset, 'Arif expressed his interest to secure the Iranian front as the Iraqi 'government has shown every intention of maintaining correct relations with Iran'.[630] However, this hope was shattered with the breakout of the Kurdish front supported by Iranian aid. Unsurprisingly, al-Hakim's opposing attitude exacerbated the situation and made 'Arif more furious against Shi'a *'ulama*.

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[629] See the telegraph letter on www.imamalhakeem.com, *Wathaeq* (Documents). See also al-'Amili, A, Abu Zaid, *Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr*, vol, 2, ibid, p.451

[630] FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, July 3, 1964.

The political dispute between Iraq and Iran undoubtedly furnished the ground for the revival of anti-Shi'ism and anti-Persian sentiments within the 'Arif circle, opening the way for emerging to surface, a new ultra-nationalist discourse with an extreme Sunni imprint. In fact, 'Arif had been the first Iraqi governor who extensively exploited state devices to employ Iraqi and Arab writers in degrading the Shi'a community, beliefs and *'ulama*. For this purpose, he commissioned scholars and historians to initiate an offensive assault reminiscent of al-Husri, al-Hisan and other Sunni writers who had engineered the first organized anti-Shi'i crusade in modern Iraq.

'Arif's response towards Shi'i '*ulama* had been bitter and twofold. 'Arif, on the one hand, tried to weaken the Shi'i *marja'iyya* in Najaf through fuelling the competition over the *marja'iyya* position. In this regard, he supported claims of some Shi'i '*ulama* like 'Ali Kashif al-Ghita and Muhammad al-Baghdadi in Najaf and Mahdi al-Khalisi in Kadhamayya. Truly, competition between Kashif al-Ghita and al-Hakim was not solely motivated by religious drivers, but also caused by obvious divergent political orientations. Kashif al-Ghita, for instance, was among a few Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf who leaned themselves in the side of the ICP against nationalists.[631] Despite this pro-Communism, Kashif al-Ghita's family had often been labeled as champions of Arabism and staunch opponent to Iran. Kashif al-Ghita, however, was not in a solid position to stand up as a real *marja'i* for two reasons: his low level of scholastic knowledge among Shi'i '*ulama* and his lack of financial resources. Kashif al-Ghita, therefore, had served as a favorite Shi'i envoy that could play the role of formal and official representative of the Iraqi Shi'i people in conferences in Iraq and abroad.[632]

If Kashif al-Ghita had posed no alternative candidate for Shi'a *marja'iyya*, both al-Baghdadi and al-Khalisi represented a momentous challenge. It is not clear, however, whether 'Arif offered any assistance to Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad al-Baghdadi in

[631] Sbahi, 'A, *'Uqood Min Tarikh al-Hizb al-Shoya'i al-Iraqi*, Damascus-2003, vol, 2, p.308.
[632] FO 371/180813, British Embassy, Baghdad to Foreign Office, 17 July 1965; Al-Khirsan, S, *Imam*, ibid, p.286.

Najaf to stand up as an Arab *marja'i taqlid* against al-Hakim. Al-Baghdadi, who had been in a ceaseless race with al-Hakim over the *marja'iyya* was of the view that Shah Muhammad Rida primarily augmented al-Hakim's position as there were mutual interests between al-Hakim and the Shah. Thus, al-Baghdadi claims, al-Hakim's *marja'iyya* was financially fostered by the former's money and the latter benefited from al-Hakim political support.[633]

'Arif not only encouraged al-Khalisi, but also aided him with money and arms in Kadhamayya, seemingly in an attempt to hinder the activities of *Jama'at al-'Ulama* in the city. To show his support to al-Khalisi, 'Arif even:

'Attended a very large Iftar at Kadhimain (17 January) given by the young Shia Imam Muhammad Mahdi al-Kalisi. Arif made a substantial donation to al-Kalisi school, and also authorized the disbursement of a sizeable sum-people say ID.20,000/ as douceurs for Imams in Karbala and Najaf who were willing to lay off attacking the regime'.[634]

'Arif also made use of the traditional dispute between al-Khalisi and al-Sadr families in Kadhamayya to play them off each other. The hostilities exploded on 16 February 1966 when an unknown person punched Shaikh Mahdi al-Khalisi. Al-Khalisi held Sayyed Ismail al-Sadr (the elder brother of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr), responsible for this attack as the attacker confessed that he was imitating Sayyed al-Hakim and used to pray behind al-Sadr in Kadhamayya. As it appeared later, the incident was pre-planned and conducted by 'Arif's secret agencies to stir problems again between the two families in order to check the activities of *Jama'at al-'Ulama* in Kadhamayya in particular. Al-Khalisi fiercely responded, when a group of his gangs stormed *al-Hashimi Mosque*, where Sayyed Ismail al-Sadr used to lead prayers. The Mosque shut down and Ismail al-Sadr fled to Najaf. As Baghdad turned a blind eye to the attack, 'Arif's message was clear in Najaf; the government stands on al-Khalisi's side against al-Hakim's camp.

[633] Al-Khirsan, S, *Imam*, ibid, pp.399-401.
[634] FO 371/ 186743, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, 29 January 1966.

This issue was to be resolved later for al-Hakim's side during the second 'Arif's reign.[635]

'Arif, on the other hand, purposely sponsored an official organized campaign to assail Shi'i people. For this end, he recruited some Sunni nationalist historians with one task in mind: rallying against the Shi'a community and casting doubt upon their loyalty to Iraq and insisting on their link to Iran. One example in hand had been 'Abdul al-'Iziz al-Douri, a highly respected academic and historian who graduated from London University with a PhD in history and was appointed by 'Arif as a Dean of Baghdad University. Al-Douri, earlier penned a book about *Shu'ubiyya*, with frequent references to Persians as an eternal enemy of the Arabs. Al-Douri dealt anew with the same issue, albeit from a different perspective, when he wrote *al-Joudhoor al-Tarikhaya lil Qawmayya al-'Arabayya* (the Historical Roots of Arab Nationalism). While al-Douri implicitly assigned Sunnis with the task of prompting Arab nationalist's cause, he purports that other communities had intentionally opposed this dream, donating to *Shu'ubiyya* and disloyal elements (especially Communists) within the Arab nation who caused the thwarting this honorable project. Denoting to Communists and *Shu'ubiyya* in Iraq had almost become synonymous to Shi'a people, who were viewed as inferred enemy.[636]

Other Sunni writers went further by linking Shi'ism to either Persian conspiracy or Jewish component or to both. In fact, these two themes were borrowed from Arab history and used frequently especially by Sunni writers. Whereas the first claim insists on the Persian origin of Shi'ism, the second one tends to associate Shi'ism to Judaism.

[635] Al-Khirsan, *al-Imam*, pp.290-2; al-Amili, A, A, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.29-30.
[636] See al-Douri, 'A al-'Iziz, *al-Joudhoor al-Tarikhaya lil Qawmayya al-Arabayya*, Beirut-1960, pp.35-41 & 102-3; al-'Alawi, H, *al-Tatheerat al-Turkaya fi al-Mashrooa' al-Qawmi al-'Arabi fi al-Iraq*, London-1988, pp.147-8; *al-Shi'a wal Dawlah al-Qawmaya fil al-Iraq 1914-90*, London-1990.p.275; Al-Azri, A, *Mushkilat al-Hukam fi al-Iraq*, pp.249-57; Graham E, Fuller and Rend Rahim F, *The Arab Shi'a: the forgotten Muslims*, ibid, pp39-40, 96.

The first claim endeavors to link the emergence of Shi'ism to a Persian conspiracy. The claim contends that Persians who lost their old glory to Muslims after a military defeat reluctantly converted to the new religion (Islam). Persians, therefore, had found in Shi'ism an efficient covert means for working from within against Islam. Doctrinal split between Sunni Islam and Shi'ism thus was interpreted as intended attempts by Persians to put an end to the pristine religion. Shi'ism, this view claims, was primarily built on hatred for Arab supremacy and accompanied by non-Islamic heretical and Gnostic elements.[637] Sunni nationalists re-emphasised linking between Arabism and Sunnis vis-à-vis anti-Arab tendency and Shi'a groups through denouncing any anti-Umayyad or anti-Abbasids movement. Whereas Arab and Islamic history became identical to Sunni Islam, Shi'a Islam was to deplore as equivalent to deviant Communism. As the Shi'a had constituted majority of Communists in Iraq, references were made here to perpetuate the immense threat of its adherents. This was also made stronger through stressing the relationship between Communism and the Zionist movement. Thus, old hatred to Arab people inherited recently by a new political movement (Communism) which works in accordance with Jewish and Persian interests.[638]

The significance of this interpretation stems from two facts. First, as such an interpretation had the backing of 'Arif's government, it was then designed to curb the role of the Shi'i majority to a minimum and controllable extent. Second, circulating this interpretation as an official nationalist view had reproduced the image of Shi'i people as collaborators with Jews. This image is meant to dispose Shi'a community of any worth values especially in the context of antagonism between the Jewish state of Israel and Arabs and Muslims. Being Communist, Ba'thist, Naserite or independent, Shi'i

[637] See, Al-'Alawi, H, *al-Shiat wal Dawlat al-Qawmeyat fi al-Iraq* 1914-1990, ibid, chapters one and two, pp19-81; Al-Azri, A, *Mushkilat al-Hukam fi al-Iraq*, Chapter five and after, pp.191-313; Graham, Fuller & Rend R, Francke, ibid.p.41.For Shi'i counterview, see Al-Waeli, A, *Hawiyat al-Tashaye*, Beirut- 1987, pp.107-8.

[638]Al-Tekriti, S.T, 'Sumood al-Qawmaya al-Arabaya Bawajh al-Harakat al-Moadaya laha', *Al-Malim Al-Jadeed*, Baghdad, 1965, vol,1, No, 28.pp.101-111; Al-Khal, I, 'Thawrat al-Qawmayat al-'Arabaya qabl Hilool 'asr al-Thwrat fi al-Iraq', *Malim Al-Jadeed*, ibid, pp.32-41.

individuals were treated as intrinsically traitors and a threat to Iraq and the wider Arab region. It is not an accident that during 'Arif's years, the old Arabic term, *Rawafidh*, had been regenerated again as a notorious description applied to Shi'i people.[639] Although anti-Shi'ism could be found in Islamic literature and might be traced back to medieval Islam and still common among Sunni scholars, its revival and sponsorship by nationalist regimes in Iraq pinpoints to the intensity of the political schism.

Unexpected developments happened in the end of 1965, were to bring Najaf's '*ulama* to a new test. The test, however, would affect not only Najaf's relations with the Iraqi government but also re-shaped the course of events between Iraq and Iran. It was Khomeini coming to Najaf that brought relations with Baghdad's authority to a new challenge.

Khomeini in Najaf

Following the death of both Burujirdi and Kashani in 1961, Khomeini and Mahmood Talaqani came out as the most politically active clerics in Iran. Since then, the radical or revolutionary trend within the Iranian '*ulama* evolved gradually around Khomeini, who emerged as a real challenge for the conservative current in the *hawza*. While Talaqani was sent to prison in 1961, Khomeini was expelled to Turkey in 1964, where from there he made his way to Najaf.[640] In his Najafi exile, Khomeini found a good space to maneuver, particularly within the complexities of the political balance between Iraq and Iran. Truly, Khomeini's next fourteen years of exile would change Iran's destiny upside down from a monarchy into an Islamic state and affect the future developments within neighboring Iraq.

Immediately after his arrival to Najaf in October 1965, Khomeini began disseminating his message. Khomeini, who commenced his lectures at Murtada al-Ansari Mosque in

[639] See al-'Alawi, H, *al-Shiat wal Dawlat al-Qawmeyat fi al-Iraq*, p.139; al-Fkaiki, H, ibid, p.273.

[640] Keddie, N, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven & London-2006, pp, 147-8 & 191-8; Akhavi, S, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*, ibid.pp.159-63.

late 1965, soon came to be recognized as a different phenomenon in Najaf's circles. No doubt, it was not traditional *fiqh* that distinguished Khomeini from the main stream in Najaf, rather the call for a new Islamic political awareness and his non-compliant stance towards Shah Muhammad Rida.

Apart from that, Khomeini gave rise to a new experiment for Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq. Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf became now under double-pressure: one concerning the cordial and friendly attitude to the Shah, and the other relating to their uneasy posture to the Iraqi government. As we shall see, national rather than religious or doctrinal issues had affected decisions of both sides: Khomeini and his Persian camp and the Shi'i '*ulama* of Iraq.

From inception, Najaf's *'ulama*, who had almost always maintained normal ties with the Shah were consulted about the coming guest. Although a majority of '*ulama* were upset over Khomeini's treatment by the Shah's government, they refrained from causing great damage for their Iranian allay.

At first, Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim was of the view that Karbala might be a good choice for housing Khomeini. Two reasons lie behind this view; there was only a handful of great *mujtahids* in Karbala and most importantly to keep Khomeini's political activities out of Najaf's *hawza*. At any rate, Khomeini seems to have made his decision to reside in Najaf rather than Karbala.[641]

'Arif's government undoubtedly saw Khomeini's presence in Iraq as an opportunity to counter the Shah influence. 'Arif sent 'Abdul Razaq Muhi al-Din (a Shi'a minister from Najaf with strong nationalist orientations) to meet Khomeini in his Najafi residence. Muhi al-Din greatly welcomed Khomeini offering him all assistance he might need. [642]

'Ulama visited Khomeini including al-Hakim, al-Khoei and al-Sadr. It appeared soon that the gap between Khomeini and Najaf's '*ulama* can not be easily bridged. Al-Khoei

[641] Al-'Amili, A, A, *Al-Sadr*, vol, 2, ibid.p.36.
[642] Al-Amili, A, A, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.34 &7.

realised, for instance that the new comer had made a complete break with the *hawza*'s worldview, with clear political determination aiming at ousting the regime in Iran.[643]

Al-Hakim and Khomeini: the scope of political commitment

Another heated meeting that took place between al-Hakim and Khomeini on 19 October 1965 perfectly illustrates the differences between the two approaches; Khomeini who was pushing hard to bring al-Hakim close to his radical wing and al-Hakim's peaceful approach. In this meeting, Khomeini urged al-Hakim to visit Iran so as to observe the situation there.

Al-Hakim: what can we do and what effect would it have?

Khomeini: certainly, it will have an effect. Thanks to 1963 uprising, we impeded the government's serious plans. If the '*ulama* were to come together, there would be a great impact.

Al-Hakim: *if we are to violently rebel, people will not obey. People are liars. They are slave to their desires and do not open their heart to religion*.

Khomeini: how do people lie? These people sacrificed their lives, suffered oppression and hardship, and they were imprisoned and displaced out of their homes and had their belongings confiscated. How can people like the grocer and shopkeeper who risk their lives be liars?

Al-Hakim: people do not obey. *They are seekers of desires and worldly things*.

Khomeini: I stated that people in 1963 expressed their courage and dignity.

Al-Hakim: *if we were to start an uprising and someone was to get injured, there will be a huge outcry and people will talk about us in a bad way*.

Khomeini: when we had revolted, we witnessed nothing save more respect, good wishes and hand kissing. Everyone who showed cowardes was criticised and became worthless of people's respect. I visited a village in Turkey, where people had told me that when Kamal Ataturk proceeded in his irreligious actions, the *'ulama* in Turkey came together and set to challenge his plans though Ataturk killed 40 of Turkey *'ulama*. I felt shame as I was thinking: Sunni '*ulama* who had felt that Islam is under attack, stood to the challenge and sacrificed 40 people. *Amidst*

[643] Ibid, p, 36-7 & 40-2.

this great threat, Shi'i 'ulama shed no blood out of their noses (neither my nose nor yours and any others). This is great shame.

Al-Hakim: *what can we do? We should bear in our mind the consequence of sacrifices and killings.*

Khomeini: *sacrifices must be paid. Let history speak that when religion faced a threat and offence, some Shi'i 'ulama stood up and some of them were killed.*

Al-Hakim: *what is the benefit of history? There should be some effect.*

Khomeini: *of course, there is a benefit. Has not the revolution of Imam Hussain produced an impressive service for history*?

Al-Hakim: *what do you say about Imam Hassan? He did not rebel.*

Khomeini: *if Imam Hassan were to have supporters like yours, then he would resist.*

Al-Hakim: *I do not see followers who obey if we call upon them to rebel.*

Khomeini*: call to rebel and I would be the first who support you.*[644] (Italic added)

This conversation reveals, among other things, the nature of political commitment, its limits and approaches pursued by both al-Hakim and Khomeini. Whereas al-Hakim was calling for peaceful protest, seeing no hope of armed resistance, Khomeini was planning to fight until shedding the last drop. Reference made by al-Hakim and Khomeini to Imam Hussain and Hassan reflects this divergence in approaching the issue of reform and how to achieve it. According to al-Hakim's point of view, peaceful means had been a sole medium in hand in order to accomplish political change. Due to the lack of supporters and the unfortunate conditions, his duty then is to follow the steps of Imam Hassan who even negotiated and concluded a settlement with his enemy Muwa'ayya. Khomeini, by contrast, was of the view that Shi'i '*ulama* must stand against unjust rule and lead revolutions not only as an option, but as a divine obligation so as to continue the *Hussaini* tradition.

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[644] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.78-80; al-Khirsan, S, *Imam*, pp, 341-3; Al-'Amili, A, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp, 37-40.

This divergence, however, relates to their different perspectives over political activism. In fact, whereas al-Hakim considered politics none of the *'ulama*'s business and, therefore confined his role to the minimum, Khomeini was on his way to develop his theory of *wilayat al-faqeeh* (Rule of Jurist). Accordingly, al-Hakim had consistently advocated the view that establishing an Islamic state is an exclusive task of the Hidden Imam. *Mujtahids*, thus, had neither the right nor to claim the right of establishing an Islamic state. Al-Hakim often stated that he supports a government or state, where all people enjoy equality and justice. Al-Hakim's opinion seems to have been developed under the influence of the conventional Shi'a current that gradually evolved and was maintained by Najafi senior scholars. Al-Hakim, who survived through monarchal and subsequent republic regimes, was certainly averse to powerful military rule and in favour of liberal views rather than popular discourse as propagated by (leftist or Islamist movements). He, therefore, rejected authoritarian static regimes, where military juntas control people's freedom. On the other hand, al-Hakim castigated the call for establishing Islamic rule as such universal ideologies seemed unfounded, unrealistic and vague, and come in conflict with original Shi'a principles.[645] Surly, al-Hakim's political outlook was affected and shaped by his theoretical convictions. No less important was al-Hakim's close attachment to his masters Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi and Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini as well as his personal experience during 1920s and 1930s. No doubt, the latter factor had contributed largely in shaping al-Hakim's political behavior.

As observed earlier, although al-Hakim had paid some attention to politics, he did not make it as his main business. In other words, al-Hakim found himself engaged in political events and reluctant to lead political protest by his own choice. On the

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[645] Al-Hakim openly rejected the Da'wa's view about establishing an Islamic state. See Anon, *al-Sadiq al-'Ahad, Safahat min Hayat al-Da'eya al-Mousis al-Istadh al-Haj Muhammad Salih al-Adeeb*, n.p-1999.p.83; Raouf, 'A, al-*'Amal al-Islami fi al-Iraq. Bayna al-Marja'iyya wal Hazbayya*, Damuscus-2000, pp.31-4. See also the coming conversation between al-Hakim and the American Ambassador.

contrary, Khomeini had gradually developed his own political views based on his theoretical assumptions and political events. For this reason, Khomeini followed political developments and changing circumstances in Iran in order to respond with his own decisions. His decisions, however, showed a great deal of pragmatic maneuvering rather than adhering to dogmatic ideals or principles. One example, which might underline this understanding, is how both al-Hakim and Khomeini dealt with Communists.

Whereas al-Hakim and most '*ulama* in Iraq regarded Communism as disbelief, Khomeini advocated pursuing good contacts with Iranian Communists. As Khomeini spearheaded the opposition movement to the Shah, realising the importance of bringing diverse Iranian movements into a wide coalition, so he did not rule out negotiations with Iranian opposition groups, including Communists. In his residence in Najaf, Khomeini used to lead meetings and discussions with both Iranian and Iraqi Communists. This open thinking towards Communists granted Khomeini a notorious label 'the Communist Cleric' within Najaf community.[646] Khomeini thus was pursuing a pragmatic tactic to unite varied Iranian groups and parties under his leadership. For their part, Iranian Communists like other groups were in the view that they found their charismatic and symbolic leader in Khomeini, who would lead the Iranian masses to oust the Shah.

Contrary to the conventionally held view, however, Khomeini's presence in Najaf had left no imprint upon Iraqi Shi'a movements in terms of intellectual and political direction.[647] Probably the opposite is true.[648] Many reasons lie behind this. First, Khomeini who had detached himself from Iraqis due to the language barrier was in an

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[646] Al-Amili, A, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, vol, 2.pp.46-7, 51; Ibrahim, B, *Mudhakarat*, ibid, pp.123-4.
[647] See for example, Marr, P, *Shi'i Fundamentalist in Iraq*: *A Test Case*, 1985, p.9; Dekmejian, R H, *Islam in Revolution, Fundamentalism in the Arab World*, Syracuse University Press-1995, pp119-21.
[648] See for example, the recent study by Menashri, D, 'Ayatollah Khomeini and the Velayat-e-Faqih', p.53, in Moghadam, A (editor), pp, 49-69, *Militancy and Political Violence in Shiism*.ibid.

isolated world, confining himself to Iranian followers and Iranian issues with no real interest in Iraqi politics. In fact, Khomeini did not show any real sympathy to Iraqi issues until the mid-1970s when the Ba'th government began expelling Iranian *'ulama*. As we shall see later, Sayyed al-Hakim and al-Khoei and even al-Sadr all were at odds with Khomeini over his relationship with the Iraqi government. It is even true to state that many Najafis were in confusion over Khomeini's good contact with the Iraqi authorities. Even the Da'wa party manifested very little and late interest in Khomeini's views.

However, historical and political conditions should be paid due considerations to gain a better understanding of both Khomeini's activism, and Shi'i '*ulama* in Iraq. Again, Iraqi Shi'i '*ulama* had a good reason to oppose the domination of a small Sunni elite in Baghdad. Thus, the Shi'a cry that often echoed during monarchal era was vigorously renewed again with 'Arif's regime. Al-Hakim therefore was stressing more upon reforming the political system in Iraq to achieve justice and equity. Further to emphasize the need to regard people fairly irrespective of their sect, religion or ethnic group, al-Hakim denounced what he labeled sectarian favoritism maintained by Baghdad's government in a way reminiscent of his predecessor Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita in 1930s. Al-Hakim, therefore, followed the steps of Kashif al-Ghita, seeking to create a broad national front that could bring about political change. Al-Hakim however, soon came to realise that the old means are far from able to fulfill this goal in a face of a sectarian regime supported by a strong army and Arab regimes. It was only military officers with tanks rather than politicians with ideologies that could cause a breakthrough.

Al-Hakim and the dilemma of change: political option or military action?

Al-Hakim seems to have been of the view that politics is not the concern of the '*ulama* and is better left for professional civilians. Thus, his interference had been rather

exceptional and meant to serve the interests of the public though he was deeply convinced of refraining from politics. His point of view was supported by both deep doctrinal beliefs and practical experience. Al-Hakim perceived that only professional politicians might engage in prolonged and complicated political pacts. Al-Hakim, therefore, sought to break the *status quo* by stressing the importance of a Shi'a voice in Baghdad particularly after the appointment of 'Abdul Rahman al-Bazaz as premier.

Evidently, growing internal discontent especially among Kurds and Shi'is as well as regional developments all have coerced 'Arif to proceed ahead in a new direction. 'Arif took this decision after realising that he was losing his main allies as nationalists resigned government and Naserites were plotting for the regime's downfall. He therefore appointed on 21 September 1965 'Abdul Rahman al-Bazaz as prime minister with one goal in mind; easing tensions inside Iraq with the hope of bringing back civil liberties into life.[649]

Al-Bazaz, a Sunni lawyer from Baghdad with extensive experience and an ardent believer in Arab nationalism appeared as a fitting option taking into account his close relations with 'Arif whose credibility was almost eroded.

Al-Bazaz's first mission was to transform the regime from its military shape into a civilian authority. He thus dissolved the National Council of the Revolutionary Command, which was created after the February coup of 1963.[650]

Al-Bazaz then embarked on his reformative plan by tackling the most pressing and urgent issues: he brokered a deal with the Kurdish leadership; introduced a moderate measures for the nationalisation laws labeled as rational, and tried to bring into life some kind of civilian rights that had disappeared gradually since the 1958 Revolution. Surely, these steps received a good welcome by Iraqis.[651]

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[649] FO 371/ 180805, Iraq: Annual Review for 1965; Tripp, C, ibid, pp.176-7.

[650] Marr, P, *The Modern History of Iraq*, ibid, p.127; Sluglett & Sluglett, ibid, p.97; Tripp, C, ibid, p.177.

[651] Marr, P, ibid, pp.128-31; Sluglett & Sluglett, ibid, pp.97-8.

Against this backdrop, al-Hakim anticipated that this is the right moment for the Shi'a community to assert its claims. He thus entreated Muhammad Rida al-Shibibi to form a new political group that could bring about his awaited change. Despite his connection with old monarchy, al-Shibibi was still considered a respected figure among independent Sunni politicians and Kurds, as they would constitute two vital partners of any potential coalition.

Al-Shibibi conducted his meetings with both Mahdi al-Hakim and Murtada al-'Askari to discuss their next steps. Following a series of prolonged meetings and discussions with independent and liberal Sunni individuals, al-Shibibi came out with his proposed memorandum.[652] Al-Shibibi's memorandum attempted to sum up the most pressing political questions that preoccupied Iraqi people. While the memorandum had raised people's concerns over the direction of Iraqi foreign policies, it primarily concentrated on domestic issues in Iraq. The memorandum, therefore, was planned and written to call upon Iraqi people (Arabs and Kurds) in order to treat relevant Iraqi issues. However, while it tackled varied social and economic issues (socialist laws, land reform and so on), the memorandum endeavours to unfold specifically the most awkward issues: sectarian policies against Shi'i people and discrimination against the Kurds. For this purpose, the memorandum refers to the sectarian tendency of the Iraqi system, which created a deep sense of division among Iraqi groups. Likewise, the memorandum stresses the importance of settling the Kurdish question, advising the use of the decentralization system, where both Arabs and Kurds could enjoy their freedom in the same country. By emphasising the need for abolishing the military system and back to civil liberal democracy, the memorandum echoes the proposal introduced earlier by the prime minister himself (al-Bazaz).[653]

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[652] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam*, ibid, p.269; al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, p.233.
[653] See the full Arabic text of the memorandum in Al-Azri, A, *Mushkilat al-Hukam fi al-Iraq*, pp,179-85

The memorandum undoubtedly recalls to the mind the People's Character (*Mithaq al-Sha'b*), that was proposed by Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita and Shi'i tribal *Shaikhs* in the Middle Euphrates in 1934. The Character had outlined the main Shi'a concerns: the call for amending the electoral law, proposing fair taxes on cultivated lands, reforming the judicial system and abolishing of the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulations.[654]

It seems that al-Shibibi's memorandum was widely greeted by Iraqi parties and independent politicians. The British Embassy estimated:

'That at least 15,000 copies are now circulating, and have aroused considerable interest… the Muslim Brethren, and of course, the left-wing splinter groups…are also active in pamphleteering'.[655]

Liberal Sunni independent figures, Kamil al-Chadarchi and Hussain Jamil both welcomed the memorandum. Al-Chadarchi, the leader of the NDP met al-Shibibi on 15 November 1965 and was quite impressed by the memorandum. Al-Chadarchi, who later distributed his own memorandum, was to insist more upon turning into a democratic system, paving the way for the realisation of the ultimate change.[656] Hussain Jamil had almost reiterated al-Shibibi's memorandum in his letter to al-Bazaz on 28 November 1965. Jamil clearly denounced the war launched against Kurds, stating that 'the worst that can befall a people is that its citizens should fight each other'. He also criticises the spread of sectarianism (*al-taifiyya*). He states that 'those who have been following events can say that Iraq had never before passed through an era so marked by this disease'.[657] Obviously, al-Shibibi's paper generated some sense of hope among Iraqi opposition movements. The memorandum was a proper start for a wide civil movement

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[654] Lukitz, L, ibid, pp.69-70; Jabar, F, *The Shi'ite Movement*, ibid, p, 137. See the full English text of this character in Kedourie, E, *The Chatham House version and other Middle Eastern Studies*, London-1984.pp.283-5, Appendix, A Shi'ite Proclamation. For the Arabic full text, see Al-Azri, A, ibid, pp, 249-57.

[655] FO371/ 180841, British Embassy, Baghdad to C.T. Brant, Foreign Office, 5 November 1965.

[656] See al-Chadarchi, K, *Min Awraq Kamil al-Chadarchi*, Beirut-1971.pp.89-91.

[657] FO 371/ 180809, Telegrams (Nos. 942 and 944), British Embassy, Baghdad to Foreign Office, 10 December 1965.

that could undertake a new political course. However, al-Shibibi's sudden death in October 1965 ended this energetic attempt.[658]

For its part, the Iraqi government had been neither willing to make concessions nor prepared to provide any viable offer. This was mainly because 'Arif was the real power in Baghdad and al-Bazaz was new to his position, hence reluctant of any unpredicted outcomes. As such, al-Hakim appeared disenchanted and probably reached the assumption that no attainable shift can be achieved in Iraq, except through military action. Al-Hakim who had experienced disrupting events since the establishment of the Iraqi state realised the need for a military group, which could bring about a breakthrough. In fact, al-Hakim's new assessment was merely a disappointed reaction to 'Arif persisting policies. However, al-Hakim himself was not certain of this choice and perhaps raised his doubts over achieving these eventual goals.

Indeed, the Iraqi Army had been at the heart of Iraqi politics since the coup of Bakir Sidki in 1936. Kedourie noticed that:

'What started with General Bakr Sidqi, who carried out the *coup d'etat* of 1936, has by now become a tradition. Not only in the sense that particular patterns of behaviour have been transmitted from one group of officers to its juniors, but more specifically in the sense that the enmities and the rancours created in the succession of military conspiracies between 1936 and 1941 survived this period and served to inspire subsequent conspiracies'.[659]

Equally important to notice here is that military involvement in politics had been a noticeable feature of the Arab East region and beyond. The post World War II years witnessed officers' corps ascendant to political arena in Syria, Iraq and Egypt alike. This turned these states from liberal parliamentary systems into radical regimes based on coercive power as a legitimate apparatus. In Iraq, however, military takeovers started earlier in 1936. The Egyptian Revolution of July 1952, therefore, did not open the

[658] FO 371/180841 Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, 26 November 1965; Al-Khirsan, *al-Imam*, ibid.p.269.
[659] Kedourie, E, 'Continuity and Change in Modern Iraqi History', *AA*, vol, 62, 1975, pp, 144-5.See also, Simon, R S, *Iraq between the Two World War*s, New York-2004, pp.107-33.

political arena for military officers but marked its stamp upon the coming events for almost the next two decades.[660]

In Iraq, this new factor became more obvious after 1941 and the failure of the takeover. The 1958 Revolution emphasised the army's role, opening the way for another three successful military coups (8 Febraury 1963, 18 November 1963 and later 1968) and dozens of aborted and foiled attempts. From 1958 onwards, military conspiracies and *coup d'etat* became more important for Iraqi parties than ideologies. As earlier noted, however, the Iraqi army had almost always remained a Sunni club open only to their families with small a presence for both Shi'i and Kurds. No surprising, Sunni military officers in Iraq had constituted the backbone of subsequent governments. Marr found that 'of the military men in cabinet since 1958, about 80 per cent have been Sunni; only 20 per cent have been Shi'ah'.[661] Both nationalists and Communists recognized the importance of military networks, henceforth planted their clandestine cells within army waiting for the right moment to jump for power. A report on the Iraqi military personalities issued by the British Embassy on 18 July 1962 concluded that although there had been some pro-Hashemites, both Ba'thists and Communists secured good positions within the Iraqi army among the high rank officers.[662]

In the same way, Najaf acknowledged the importance of military officers as their involvement is essential to have a successful coup. For this reason, al-Hakim took an unexpected step in this direction in the hope of attracting the hearts of some Shi'i officers. Again, al-Hakim seems to have reached this conclusion as an expression of his disappointment over altering 'Arif's policies. Al-Hakim began his new venture first through communicating with Sayyed Hamid al-Hisoonah, a senior Shi'i officer from Nassirayya and a Commander of the first Iraqi Division stationed near Diwanayya. Al-

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[660] About the role of military in Arab politics, see George Haddad's comprehensive study *Revolution and Military Rule in the Middle East* (3 vols), New York-1965-1971. About Iraq in particular, see vol, 2, pp.55-180.
[661] Marr, P, ibid, p.289.
[662] FO 371/ 164233, Secret, from Colonel A, W, Innes, to the War Office-London, 18 July 1962.

Hakim had earlier established a good connection with al-Hisoonah as the latter showed an anti-Communist attitude during the rising tide of the ICP in 1959. Al-Hisoonah deliberately prevented the circulation of *Sout al-Sha'ab*, the Communist organ in the southern regions under his command. It is also reported that al-Hisoonah had contributed in circulating al-Hakim's *fatwa* against the ICP.[663] Al-Hakim, thus, attended himself during the funeral of al-Hisoonah's father, as an expression of his respect and condolence for al-Hisoonah.[664]

There has been some dispute whether or not al-Hisoonah intended to carry out a takeover. On the one hand, al-Hisoonah's communications with al-Hakim were under close surveillance of 'Arif's intelligence. Leaks about al-Hisoonah's involvement came again from Egyptian Intelligence as al-Hisoonah was living in Cairo at that time. In fact, a report passed by Egyptian Intelligence had linked al-Hisoonah to the Fatimid party.[665] 'Arif undoubtedly was obsessed during this period with military coups as he successfully foiled several attempts against his life. 'Arif, for instance, barely escaped in 1963 Qasim's same fate at the hands of a group of committed Communist ranks who were plotting for the interest of the ICP. Led by Hassan Saria', a group of retired and deserted soldiers and workers (affiliated with the ICP) attacked the Rashid military training camp on 3 July 1963, where they captured several Ba'th ministers and officers. This coup, however, failed to achieve its goal as its leaders were captured and soon executed by 'Arif's regime.[666]

It is not clear whether al-Hakim supported or encouraged other Shi'i officers to plot against 'Arif. This applies specifically to al-Janabi's attempt that took place around that time. The coup involved:

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[663] Dann, U, *Iraq under Qasim*, ibid, p.303; Al-Hisoonah, 'Omar, 'Lamahat wa Haqaiq Tarikhayya 'An Sayyed Hameed al-Hisoonah', *Sotaliraq.com*, accessed in 11-05-2010.
[664] *Al-Iraq bayna al-Madi wal Hadhir wal Mustaqbal*, ibid, pp.550-1.
[665] FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy-Baghdad, July 31, 1964.
[666] Sa'id, 'A, K, *al-Iraq: al-Barayat al-Musalaha, Harakat Hassan Sareea' Wa Qatar al-Mout 1963*, Beirut-2002, pp.70-108.

'A take-over of key points in Rashid, Washash and Abu Ghraib camps. The whole thing seems to have gone off at half-cook…of these plotters, Lt.Colonel Rashid Janabi is said to be under house arrest at Hilla; Shaikh Ali Shaalan has fled the country'.[667]

Some of al-Hakim's close assistants assert that al-Janabi had conducted his attempt in conjunction with al-Hakim's approval. Al-Janabi, according to these sources, had worked under al-Hakim's auspices to form a broad alliance with the '*ulama* and tribesmen that could motivate Shi'i people in the South and Mid-Euphrates to support their future action. Al-Janabi, who survived 'Arif's reign, was to be arrested again in 1970 by the Ba'th regime over his role in an alleged coup and thus executed.[668]

Prior to the 1968 takeover, some Shi'i officers approached al-Hakim to earn his blessings for another military coup. Al-Hakim however showed a vigilant position towards the officers' intention or, as al-Hakim stated himself, for unpredicted consequences. In fact, al-Hakim was aware of the ongoing secret actions and movements by different groups and officers within the Iraqi army to topple the regime. Thus, he rejected some offers, giving no green light to any attempt. No doubt, al-Hakim's close links to 'Abdul Rahman 'Arif himself, contributed to his reluctant attitude to such military venture.[669] Again, this position attests to the earlier conclusion about al-Hakim's role, motives and reasons that forced him to support military action against the first 'Arif as an exceptional and last resort after many failed attempts to alter the regime's policies.

Al-Bazaz who was aware of widespread discontent among the Shi'a community and particularly great '*ulama* in Najaf came to a new proposition: opening a new and direct window with al-Hakim himself to find a solution for political stagnation in Iraq. Al-

[667] FO 371/ 175749, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, July 31, 1964.
[668] See al-Qazwini, J, *al-Marja'ayya al-Dinayya al-'Alyya 'Inda al-Shi'a al-Imamayya, Dirasah fi al-Tatawer al-Sayasi wal 'Almi*, Beirut-2005, p274.
[669] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.77-8.

Bazaz was hoping to find reconciliation between 'Arif and Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf. For this purpose, al-Bazaz paid:

'A three- day visit to the holy cities, meeting Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim at Kufa on the evening of 20 January [1966]'… and al-Hakim made 'complaints about sectarianism, the folly of the war in the North, a plea to abolish the personal status law of 195[9] and why hadn't Bazaz taken more positive steps against agrarian reform and nationalization laws.?'[670]

It seems that al-Bazaz was pressing during his visit to organize a meeting between 'Arif himself and al-Hakim. Some '*ulama* and Najaf's Kilidar were also among the mediators who worked hard in the hope of appeasing al-Hakim to meet 'Arif. Al-Hakim, however, insisted again on his demands: unless the nationalisation laws are lifted, no meeting is to be held with 'Arif. The discussions that were carried out by al-Hakim's assistants, revealed a kind of inconsistency over al-Hakim's next step towards 'Arif. The Byzantine question was hanging over whether a meeting with 'Arif would come first or 'Arif should jettison his controversial decrees (nationalisation laws).[671] Al-Hakim made his mind in the last minute when 'Arif was on his way to meet him in Najaf as al-Hakim 'maintained stoutly that he had nothing to say to the champion of Arab socialism in Iraq, as socialism could not be reconciled with the tenets of the Quran'.[672] Surely, 'Arif sensed embarrassment if not humiliation before al-Hakim, hence the gap widened between the two sides. However, the helicopter crash that led to 'Arif's death in April 1966, sorted out the problem, putting an unexpected end to the 'Arif-al-Hakim dispute.

Nevertheless, Najaf's reaction to 'Arif's offer exhibited real confusion amongst Najaf's *'ulama*, and a lack of detailed and clear demands on the part of the *marja'iyya*. Indeed, Najaf was not in need of right cause. Instead, it was in need of a right strategy and vision to meet Baghdad's politicians. This shortage would manifest itself again during

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[670] FO 371/ 186743, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, 29, January 1966. The date in the original text is 1952. The correct is 1959.

[671] Al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, pp.239-40.

[672] FO 371/ 186743, Confidential, British Embassy, Baghdad, 18 March 1966.

the first years of the second Ba'th reign. However, 'Arif's tragic death ushered in a sense of Shi'a triumph over 'Baghdad's arrogant policies', generating energetic activity among Shi'a youth to realise their aspirations.

Najaf and the second 'Arif

On 17 April 1966, 'Abdul Rahman Arif was chosen as president of Iraq. 'Abdul Rahman 'Arif was an Arab nationalist yet unlike his late brother, he was a moderate and less trained military officer. Apparently, the process of appointing 'Abdul Rahman was a compromise deal, the fact that wrought him enormous pressure of competing factions and contributed in ending his era soon.[673]

In his turn, 'Abdul Rahman 'Arif named al-Bazaz as prime minister, giving an early indication of his support for continuing reformative and moderate rather than radical and provoking policies. Al-Bazaz, who had been aware of his precarious standing among military corps, sought to consolidate his position and took this opportunity to accomplish his ambitious program. As he observed Rahman 'Arif's moderate attitude towards Shi'i *'ulama*, al-Bazaz seems to have approached al-Hakim's assistants to secure the *marjaiyya's* support in the face of the strong military front in Baghdad.[674]

Against this political friction in Baghdad, al-Hakim emerged as a leading figure, whose views were sought, consulted and shared by Iraqi politicians. It was not an accident that al-Hakim proposed at this time to form a presidential council with members of the main three Iraqi groups; Sunni, Shi'i and Kurd. Seemingly, this proposition was a repetition of the presidential council formed by Qasim after the 1958 Revolution. No doubt, such proposed plan expressed deep-seated concerns of both Shi'is and Kurds over the low representation within the Iraqi political system. Al-Bazaz, however, was not in a sound position to impose the terms of his plan as the real power was concentrated in the hands

[673] Khadduri, M, *The Republican Iraq*, ibid, pp.264-5; Marr, P, ibid, p.131; Tripp, C, ibid, pp.178-9.
[674] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, p.77.

of Baghdad's powerful military officers. Consequently, al-Bazaz turned down this bid.[675]

Over the next two years, instability and intense political struggle had marked the Iraqi arena. Al-Hakim, thus, asserted as early as 1966 the crucial need to organize a Shi'a political group that could take its part in forming the government in Baghdad. Al-Hakim voiced his ambition as some Shi'i '*ulama* approached him in 1388/ 1968 with proposals to institute a form of benevolent association to promote *al-Itabat al-Maqadasa* (the Holy Threshold). Al-Hakim, who declined this proposal, stated instead that attention and efforts must be paid to form a political group in order to secure a fair share for Shi'a people in the event of any unpredictable change in Baghdad.[676]

Indeed, al-Hakim's view was a reflection to the political unrest in Baghdad and the possibility of a new coup. Concerns became more pressing by the beginning of 1968. Probably as a response to al-Hakim's instructions, both Murtada al-'Askari and Sayyed Mahdi al-Hakim commenced a new political initiative around this time. As such, Shi'i religious men frequently paid visits to the tribes that inhabited the areas around Baghdad in the hope of securing their support for the *marja'iyya*. A new group was formed under the name of *Harakat Abnae Thawrat al-Ishreen* (Movement of the Sons of 1920 Revolution) to link these tribes with their counterparts in the South and Mid-Euphrates to prepare for a future joint action.[677]

Again, al-Hakim expressed his opinion over the form of the state, the place of Islam and the role exercised by '*ulama* within the framework of this state. Al-Hakim asserted his views during a meeting with the American Ambassador in Baghdad, who paid a surprise visit to al-Hakim in Najaf in 1967. In response to a question put forward by the Ambassador concerning the *marja'iyya*'s position towards the form of government accepted by Najaf and Shi'a demands, al-Hakim stated: we need this, pointing at his

[675] Al-Saraj, 'A, ibid, pp.241.
[676] Al-Amili, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.119-20; al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam*, ibid, pp.305-6.
[677] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam* , ibid, pp,306-7.

Minhaj al-Saliheen.[678] In fact, al-Hakim was emphasising on justice and equality rather than calling for establishing an Islamic system, where religious '*ulama* control civil authority. Al-Hakim's view, it is well known, was the sharp opposite to *Wilayyat al-Fiqeeh* as introduced later by Khomeini. Justice and equality, according to al-Hakim, are the main pillars of any political system. Repeatedly, al-Hakim's political approach echoed the traditional line of thought dominating in Najaf's *hawza* until nowadays. Although this approach has always defended a fair share for Shi'i people, it did not show any interest in the political game itself. However, al-Hakim forcefully denounced the sectarian tendency of the Iraqi governments, declaring that such an unfair system would be a destructive one for the whole society. No doubt, al-Hakim's denunciation of sectarianism was not a new call but a renewed cry of Shaikh Kashif al-Ghita and other *mujtahids* who defended Shi'a interests during the monarchal era.[679] Thus, the charge made against al-Hakim that he was playing a sectarian card against the first 'Arif according to the Shah's interest seems to be inaccurate as al-Hakim himself distanced from making any claim before the second 'Arif.[680] Truly, al-Hakim's close assistants may have attempted to influence al-Hakim's decisions according to their orientation. Al-Hakim's close circle included at least six *'ulama* of Persian origin: Shaikh Muhammad al-Rashti, Shaikh Muhi al-Din al-Mamqani, Sayyed Muhammad al-Hashimi, Sayyed Ibrahim al-Yezdi (mentioned earlier), Sayyed Ja'far al-Mara'ashi and Sayyed 'Ali al-Khilkhali.[681] However, al-Hakim's opinions seem to have voiced largely his real beliefs, ideals and convictions.

Al-Bazaz's government, however, did not survive the pressure exerted upon it by powerful military factions and conflicting groups that surrounded 'Arif. The officer's

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[678] Al-Hakim's main law book, where imitators find rulings and *fatwas*.

[679] Al-Asadi, M H, 'Mufradat al-Nuhdha fi Khitab al-Imam Al-Hakim', pp.232-48, *al-Fikr al-Jadeed*, No,17,1995.

[680] See for example, Rauoof, 'A, *Anbaya wa Asnam*, Baghdad-2009, pp.109-15; idem, *Al-'Amal al-Islami fi al-Iraq*, ibid, pp.36-42.

[681] Al-Hakim, M B, *Marja'ayyat*, ibid, pp.272-3.

corps, who were alarmed by al-Bazaz political steps (his moderate attitude towards the Kurdish question, liberal reforms suggested and above all his intention to squeeze the army budget), were determined to get rid of al-Bazaz. By the summer of 1966:

'Hostility had built up in the officer corps that 'Abd al-Rahman Arif felt obliged to dismiss al-Bazaz, replacing him with a former member of the Free Officers, Naji Talib, who promptly formed a cabinet in which military officers held most of the principal portfolios'.[682]

His replacement, Naji Talib was another compromise rather than a real solution. Talib, a Shi'i military officer with hard line Arab nationalist tendencies, relied on other officer corps for his survival. As a result, his tenure ended soon with 'Arif's new move to bring the presidency and premiership in his hand. 'Arif, however, nominated Tahir Yahya in July 1967 as prime minister before the latter was toppled by his Tekriti fellows in July 1968.

The precarious political situation in Iraq coincided with regional turbulent events that brought down the confidence of Arab people in their political systems and ideologies. The aftermath of the Arab-Israel war in 1967 resulted, among other things, in shaking the confidence in the credibility of the Arab nationalist project. Consequently, while before 1967, Islamic movements were on the defensive side and Arab nationalism on the offensive, the 1967 defeat reversed the tide in favour of Islamic ideology at the expense of pan-Arab ideology.[683] According to Ajami:

'Islamic trend made an eloquent and moving case of its own and turned defeat into advantage. Fundamentalists argued that the Arabs had lost the war not because they were busy worshipping- as the radical caricature would have it- but because they had lost their faith and bearings: Disconnected from a deeply held system of beliefs, the Arabs proved an easy prey to Israeli power'.[684]

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[682] Tripp, C, ibid, p, 188.

[683] Abu-Rabi', I, *Contemporary Arab Thought, Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, London-2004, p.70; Dawisha, A, ibid, pp.252-81.

[684] 'Ajami, F, *The Arab Predicament,* ibid, p.61.

Arab nationalism's defeat paved the way for Islamic ideologies to prosper in many Arab countries and wider Islamic world. Iraq was no exception. In the same way that nationalist groups placed its blame on liberal and Communist ideologies for losing Palestine, Islamist movements picked up the Palestine question to beset governing nationalist regimes.

Even for a hard-believer in Arab nationalism like Salman al-Safwani who regarded that Arabs are the only people responsible for the disastrous failure in Palestine war in 1948, the Arab's humiliating defeat in 1967 attributed now to their corrupted values and morals. Al-Safwani, who had announced that he would abandon his faith if Arabs fail the Palestine war, came again in the eve of the June 1967 defeat to state that he lost his faith only in an oratorical declaration. He called upon 'Arabs to know their faults and mistakes, reconsidering again our principles, foundations and concepts, which we based our construction upon it'.[685]

Yet the question for Shi'i Islamists was clear: Arabs failed their war due to one major reason; they lost their great conviction in Islam as they adhered to secular ideologies. Doctor Jabir al-'Ata, a leading member of the Da'wa party, stated that the 'destiny of the *Ummah* (Muslim Community) is fully associated with its faith as a system of beliefs'. He urged, therefore the *Ummah* to come back to this system by adopting it 'as a way of our life'.[686] Sayyed Hadi al-Hakim put it very clear: Palestine is an Islamic question rather than Arab issue. It is not a nationalist issue that relates only to the Arabs but to the whole Muslims. It is Islam; therefore, that leads us to victory.[687]

Najaf seems to have enjoyed a prevailing sense of self-confidence during these years over its role in Iraq and the potential revival of Islam and Shi'ism in particular to take the lead in reforming the situation in Iraq and probably the whole *Umma*. This judgment stemmed from the eminent role played by al-Hakim and the belief that he was capable

[685] *Al-Iyman*, No, 5-6.pp.65-6.
[686] Ibid, pp.69-70.
[687] Ibid, pp.45-6.

to mobilize his followers against the central government in Baghdad whenever he wished. Likewise, Shi'a movements (Da'wa and *'Ulama*) had shared this confidence, benefiting from al-Hakim's prestige and status.[688] By the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968, the Shi'a movement in Iraq possessed an excellent opportunity to spread its word whether through *'Ashura* processions or even political demonstrations.

Al-Hakim, who realized the regime's weakness, seems to have been torn over the proper political option: on the one hand, he established a good relationship with 'Arif, calling him 'our excellent son'.[689] 'Arif, too, presented his best character towards al-Hakim through his personal contacts and care. His delegation and envoys used to take part in Shi'a ceremonies and festivals especially those organized by *Jama'at al-'Ulama* in Baghdad and Kadhamayya, giving a perception that 'Arif support and recognized their work. Al-Hakim, on the other hand, witnessed how the regime was vulnerable and the looming threat of a new takeover.

Working underground, the Ba'th party seized this opportunity to destabilize the political situation in order to win power. As the party was illegal in this period, Ba'thists resorted to the old tactic used against the Communists and Qasim between 1961 and 1962. They infiltrated themselves into political or religious demonstration organized notably by Shi'i activists, calling for a Shi'a government with Najaf as the new capital of Iraq and al-Hakim as its leader. Furthermore, Ba'thist security agents who may have been concealed in civilian cloths, attacked Shi'a symbols and banners such as portrayals of the Imams in an attempt to agitate Shi'a demonstrators against Baghdad's government.[690] Further to orchestrating these movements under the guise of Shi'a religious activities, this tactic enabled Ba'thists to gauge the extent and weight of

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[688] See Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, note in, pp.82-3.
[689] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam* , ibid.p.701.
[690] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam*, ibid, pp.310-1.

Shi'a political activism itself, the fact that demonstrated itself soon after 'Arif's downfall.[691]

In the meantime, Ba'th officers who were preparing the ground for a new coup, communicated through some Shi'i mediators with al-Hakim to sense the views of the *marja'iyya*. Al-Hakim was extremely alarmed by the Ba'th's new venture. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakir, who would rise as the president of Iraq after 1968, led the meetings with al-Hakim to appease the latter's concerns. Al-Hakim however manifested an unclear attitude, emphasising first and foremost the prohabition of shedding any blood.[692]

While Shi'i Islamists made their words loudly heard in Baghdad's street, a Sunni military junta brought the Ba'th party again to power on 17 July 1968. Like its predecessor in 1963, the Ba'th's coup accomplished its goal with a small group of devoted officers. However, contrary to the old Ba'th, the new party was determined to share no power with other groups, signifying the beginning of a long phase in contemporary Iraqi history.

Conclusion

Najaf's leading and increasing capability that was built up over this period stemmed from and based on its traditional reputation as an independent religious centre. Political dimension now added as religio-political concerns interwoven together during the last decade (1958-1968). Owing to the massive religio-political networks and thanks to al-Hakim's charismatic leadership, Najaf had established a good opportunity to mobilize its partisans in the Shi'a areas.

In the course of six years (1963-68), al-Hakim followed two different approaches towards Baghdad's government: he defended no specific Shi'a political demand during

[691] Al-Khirsan, S, *al-Imam*, ibid, pp.310-1.See the note in, ibid, p.310.
[692] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid,154-5; al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.83-4.

the first months (the Ba'th period). However, he shifted into a more radical approach with the first 'Arif, calling for fair representation within the Iraqi political systemg. Al-Hakim returned to his old peaceful stance with the coming of the second 'Arif.

Although the relationship between al-Hakim and the Shi'i Islamic movement had been an awkward one, the two sides often worked to sustain each other. Al-Hakim backed by the Shi'i movement had a good chance to pressurize Baghdad to win their desirable option. However, despite its huge sources and followers, the Shi'i Islamist movement lacked cooperation and clear direction. This made the movement in a reactionary position rather than taking the lead to make a viable initiative or efficient political direction.

Al-Hakim's plan to form a moderate political group, which could carry on national reformative demands to reclaim civil rights, had been late and came to an abrupt end soon. This initiative received a positive reaction especially from Sunni figures (al-Bazaz, Hussain Jamil and al-Chaderchi) as well as the Kurdish movement. Nevertheless, al-Hakim and the Shi'i movement were standing far from other secular Shi'a personalities (Ahmad al-Haboobi, Fouad al-Rikabi and many others); let alone the rest of the left.

Although powerful in its position, nevertheless the *marja'iyya* in Najaf lacked the key to make a change in the Iraqi political system; that is a group of military officers affiliated with and sympathetic to Shi'a demands. Iraqi politics appeared in complete domination by military corps who almost always originated from Sunni regions. It was military power (Ba'th) rather than ideology (Shi'a movement) that decided the fight over political authority, denying the Shi'i movement a golden opportunity to seize power in Baghdad.

Chapter VI

Najaf and the Tikriti Ba'th 1968-1980

The Ba'th Party took over the power in Baghdad in July 1968. From now until 1980, a breakthrough in Iraq's regional relations coincided with domestic political shifts and economic growth led to tightening the Ba'th grip on power. Internal developments correlated with/ and resulted from new regional balances and both played decisive role in serving the Ba'th regime. The Ba'th regime initially adopted a policy of divide and rule with the main opposition groups (the Kurds, and then the ICP) to curb the influence

of the Shi'a institution and then proceeded to remove the whole Iraqi opposition by the mid of 1970s. Internal rivals, notably the Shi'a political movement, the *marja'iyya* and the Kurds were severely curtailed by the regime, which entrenched its regional position. The *marja'iyya*, therefore, was compelled to adopt a defensive position particularly after 1970. Although this new approach was due mainly to the Ba'th's repressive policies, it nonetheless was directly related to the decentralized nature of the *marja'iyya* itself. However, this defensive posture was temporarily interrupted in 1977 with the popular uprising in Najaf, which led to the radicalization of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and culminated in his final encounter with the Ba'th regime between 1979 and 1980.

Thus, this chapter will shed light on the broader regional dynamics of Iraq, exploring how shifts in the balance of power contributed to the strengthening of the Ba'th regime in Baghdad. External changes will be examined to ascertain how they affected the nature of the confrontation between the Iraqi regime and the Shi'a stronghold centre, Najaf, culminating in a series of organized attacks against Shi'a religious institutions, '*ulama* and activists. This chapter will end with analyzing the Najafi famous uprising of 1977 and the re-emergence of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr as the most vocal religious leader of the Shi'i movement prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Additionally, the factors behind the failure of al-Sadr's revolution will be compared with successful realisation of the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

The Ba'th in power: divide and rule

Scholars of Iraqi studies have pointed out that the Ba'th party that came to power in 1968 was at odds with the Ba'th party of 1963. In fact, the term 'New-Ba'th is applied to both branches in Syria and Iraq that re-emerged in 1960s as 'the Ba'th Party of the 1960s was a very different party from that of the 1940s and 1950s, with new people in leadership roles, new emphases in ideology, and a new power factor-military officers

acting in its name'.[693] This is particularly true with regard to its component. While Shi'a members constituted clear majority within the Iraqi Ba'th's echelon in 1963, the Ba'th of 1968 'had become an overwhelmingly Sunni party'[694] with a prominent Tikriti element. So, Shi'a representation dropped sharply to only 6 percent.[695] Thus, 'the second Ba'th regime has been characterized by the dominance of Tikritis, which arose chiefly because of substantial Tikriti representation in the army and other security forces at the time of the Ba'th coup of 1968, and the tendency to recruit one's kith and kin'.[696] Most importantly, the Shi'a representation in both the RCC and RL was nil. Baram noticed that all the members were Sunni Arabs 'in both Institutions' as 'there was not a single Shi'i Arab in the Baghdad based pan-Arab leadership'.[697] Despite the fact that the regime admitted later Shi'a members to both the RCC and RL and appointed some Shi'a personals for ministerial positions, the fact remains true that the general colour of the regime was an overwhelming Sunni with the domination of Tikrit region. The foundations of the regime, however, became more narrowly based by the end of 1970s with the coming of Saddam Hussain, who built the regime on a cult of his personality as leader and the principle of absolute personal loyalty to him. Dawisha states correctly that:

In addition to the considerable increase in the use of terror, what separates the post-1979 period from the earlier decade of Ba'thist rule, politically as well as culturally and intellectually, was the extraordinary personalization of political power; the effort to appropriate every cultural symbol onto the person of Saddam Hussain; the determined elevation of his persona to the

[693] Devlin, J, F, *the Ba'th Party, A History from the Origins to 1966*, Stanford University-1976, California, p.187
[694] Luizard, P-J, p.96.See also Baram, A, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89*, Macmillan-London,1991.p.13,
[695] Ibid, p.96.Unlike Iraq, the Ba'th party in Syria became since the mid of 1960s dominated by the Alewi of Shi'a minority. See also, Baram, A, ibid.p.15.
[696] Baram, A, the Ruling Political Elite in Ba'thi Iraq 1968-1986: the Changing Features of a collective Profile, *IJMES*, 21 (1989), 447-93.p.450.
[697] Baram, A, ibid, p.451. See also Ibrahim, F, *Al-Taefayya wa-l Sayasa fi al-'Alem al-'Arabi*, ibid.p.292.

forefront of the consciousness of every Iraqi.[698]

From the outset, the new Ba'th regime showed clear determination to share no power with other partners. This was accomplished through successive organized attempts to crush internal threats and any potential rivals. Soon after the success of the coup, the *Tikriti* group, headed mainly by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakir and Saddam Hussain, removed the *Dulaimi* contingent represented by Ibrahim al-Dawood and 'Abdul Razaq al-Naif from their top positions. Other political activists were either imprisoned or tortured to death, Fouad al-Rikabi and 'Abdul Rahman al-Bazaz, to name two of many other victims, or forced to flee Iraq.[699] The regime did not tolerate even Arab nationalists, suspected of their lack of allegiance, who shared its main goals and principles including Ba'thists, Naserits and other groups for suspecting their loyalty. Heavy-handed policies sent a warning to political groups (the ICP, the Kurds, the Da'wa activists) as well as independent figures.

Repressive policies reinforced the Ba'th regime allowing it to benefit from near absolute control of Iraq. Admittedly, other political and economic factors contributed in hardening the grip of the Ba'th over power although the party had relatively small base. The Ba'th employed economic development for carrying out a Ba'thification program that designed to bring every aspect of the Iraqi society and state under its control. Ba'th membership, therefore, became a device by the regime's hand to recruit people and determine their political direction. As such, the Ba'th membership increased rapidly to transform the party from a small group into a large entity involved in every aspect of life in Iraq. Whereas the Ba'th counted only about 300 members in 1955, the number soared over 100,000 full members by 1976 and a half million supporters.[700] Iraqi youth

[698] Dawisha, A, *Iraq, a Political History from Independence to Occupation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford-2009-USA, pp.215-6. See also Makaya, K (Samir Al-Khalil) *Republic of Fear*, *The inside story of Saddam Iraq*, Hutchinson Radius, London-1989, pp.110-18.
[699] Tripp, C, ibid, pp.186-90; Sluglett, ibid, pp.119-23.
[700] Sluglett, ibid, pp.136-7.

enlisted through the *fatawa* system while professional people working in the government sector, which formed a huge majority, were recruited as a reserved and loyal force. The Ba'th also founded in the late 1970 its paramilitary group, *al-Jaysh al-Shabi* (the People Army), whose tasks were similar to the National Guard in the first Ba'th era in 1963.

In the same tokens, the immense revenue of oil further reinforced the Ba'th regime's position in the region especially after the rapid deterioration of Egypt's political role in the Arab arena. Clearly, the Ba'th adopted a mix of Pan-Arabist rhetoric and a pragmatic program that aimed at consolidating its internal position as well as its wider regional standing. The Ba'th continued its assertion for liberating the whole of Palestine in an attempt to lead the tide in the Arab domain and to rally Iraqis around its leadership. This became more obvious after Naser's death in September 1970 who was succeed by Anwar al-Sadat, who pursued a new peaceful path that culminated in the Camp David peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

The Ba'th also reflected this policy in cementing its relationship with the Soviet Union and the Eastern block countries. This policy not only provided the new Ba'th regime with greatly needed political and military support but also gave it a moment of respite to deal with the main opposition group; the ICP. In this regard, the Ba'th succeeded in winning the support of the ICP as the new regime sent positive signals towards the activities of the ICP. This was also true with regard to the Kurdish movement. Thus, by the end of May 1969 and especially after the announcement of the Manifesto of 11 March 1970, the Ba'th regime was capable to carry out its policies towards the more immediate and main threat looming on the horizon; the *marja'iyya* and the Shi'a political movement. The Ba'th regime however reversed to its conventional authoritarian method in solving the Kurdish question after 1975. As Iran withdrew its support to the Kurdish rebels according to the March 1975 treaty signed with the Ba'th

government, the Iraqi Army crushed readily the Kurdish forces within two weeks.[701]

Al-Hakim and the Ba'th: cautious welcome

Soon after the initial announcement by the new Ba'th regime, although considered by al-Hakim to be promising he held back from showing public support. However, he was disappointed over the Shi'a tiny representation within the new government.[702] For its part, the new regime was interested in al-Hakim's view. Several representatives from the governments were sent to gain knowledge of al-Hakim's point of view. The two parties agreed to hold meetings in order to discuss arising issues and reviewing relevant matters. Al-Bakir appointed 'Abdul Hassan Waday al-'Atayya, a Shi'a Ba'thi from Diwanayya, to demonstrate his understanding of Shi'a concerns. Waday al-'Atayya and Sayyed Mahdi al-Hakim, the main representative of al-Hakim conducted a series of meetings. These protracted meetings, however, did not lead to any common understanding between the two sides. It was obvious that the Ba'th regime was more interested in buying time to consolidate power rather than in addressing the demands of *marja'iyya*.[703]

Thus, the first test occurred when the government ordered at the end of January 1969 the shutting down of the Kufa University and confiscated the money donated to this promising project.[704] This surprise action disturbed al-Hakim, who sent his son, Mahdi to meet al-Bakir in Baghdad. Al-Bakir distanced himself from this decision and placed the blame on other government's members. However, this sudden and harsh action should be seen within the context of the prolonged meetings that were being held between the government and al-Hakim's representatives. Obviously, Saddam Hussain, who was the hidden driving power behind the regime, was pushing to arrange meetings

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[701] Slugglet, ibid, pp.187-90; Tripp, C, ibid, pp.193-4; Marr, P, ibid.p.157.
[702] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.358-60.
[703] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*.pp.365-7.
[704] Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamayya, Bihth Wathaiqy fi Maseerat al-Da'wa*, vol, 2 17/7/1968- 9/4/1980, Beirut, 2009, pp.20-1; Makaya, M, *Khawatir al-Sinin*, ibid, pp.235-40; al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.322 & p.359; al-Amili, A, ibid, vol, 2, pp.140-1. See the previous chapter about the project.

with Mahdi al-Hakim. Mahdi al-Hakim declined repeated offers made by Saddam.[705] For this reason, Saddam reacted by closing down the Kufa University project, an act that forced al-Hakim to seek al-Bakir's intervention, which seemed hopeless. So, tension began to surface soon as the negotiations between al-Hakim and Baghdad government broke down. Again, Iran proved to be the final straw that failed the test.

The Ba'th and Al-Hakim: the Iranian test

While meetings with al-Hakim's delegates were going ahead, Iraqi troops were engaged in intense fighting with Kurdish rebels supported by the Iranians. Furthermore, the Iranian government renewed its demands to alter the treaty of 1937 regarding the border and the Shat al-'Arab in the south. Seemingly, the Iranian hostile attitude broke out as a response to the suspected assistance given by Baghdad government to Khomeini, the firm opponent of the Shah regime in Iran. As a consequence, the Iranian envoys interrupted their visit to Baghdad on 12 February 1968 and returned to Tehran.[706] The Ba'th government, for its part, attempted to ascertain al-Hakim's plans through raising the Iranian card. By doing so, the Ba'th government aimed at putting double pressure on al-Hakim and the Shah with one goal: solving the dispute through the Najaf mediator.

In fact, the Ba'th government during the meetings with al-Hakim's representatives raised the topic of Iranian implication in supplying the Kurdish movement with weapons and other support and how this exhausted the Iraqi Army. The Ba'th regime then pressed al-Hakim to decree a clear *fatwa* against the Shah's regime similar to that issued against the ICP. Al-Hakim first resisted this request, arguing that such a *fatwa* would only deepen the schism among Muslims rather than solve the problem. Al-Hakim also insisted that the Kurdish question should be resolved within the boundaries of the Iraqi state as an internal problem though in cooperatioin with both the Kurds and the

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[705] Al-Hakim, M, *Mudhakarat*, pp.79-83; al-Amili, ibid, vol, 2, pp.141-2; al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.362-5. In retrospect, Hassan Shubar critically questions the way of handling negotiations with Saddam and the Ba'th according to personal manner. See Shubar, H, *Hizb*, vol, 2, pp.7-11.

[706] Al-Amili, vol, 2.p.143.

Iranian state.[707] Al-Hakim's reply reveals undoubtedly a sense of diplomacy and was an attempt to avoid being embroiled with political issues especially with the Shah. The Iranian card raised again by al-Bakir himself during his surprise visit to al-Hakim in Najaf in April 1969. Again, al-Hakim rejected al-Bakir request.[708]

As the Ba'th government eased the pressures on the northern front by the beginning of May 1969, it turned now its attention to the Shi'a front. The Iraqi government began its offensive by expelling thousands of *hawza* students and citizens of Iranian origin. It also issued a decree according to which previously exempt religious students became subject to the Iraqi military conscription. This coincided with the closing down of several Iranian schools particularly in Baghdad. At the same time, the regime tried to use the carrot and the stick approach with al-Hakim. Meetings between al-Hakim himself and the government's delegates were held in the hope of reaching some solution for the situation. To pull the rug from under the government's feet, al-Hakim demanded the Iraqi government present an official request addressed by al-Bakir himself, together with ceasing measures against Iranian citizens.[709] However, while the Ba'th government halted its procedures against the Iranian citizens for a short period, it dismissed the idea of writing an official request.

Meanwhile, the Ba'th regime saved no effort to eliminate Shi'a institutions so as to weaken its influence among people. *Kulait Usul al-Din* (College of Principles of Religion) closed down together with its official mouthpiece organ *Risalat al-Islam* (the Message of Islam). Moreover, Shi'a merchants were executed, expelled or harshly treated by the regime. As Shi'a merchants constituted a large segment within the urban community in Baghdad and contributed financially to the Shi'a *marja'iyya* (*Khums* and other funds), this step by the regime seemingly aimed at limiting the influence of the *marja'iyya* itself. From the beginning of 1970s onwards, the Ba'th government

[707] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp, 367-8.
[708] Al-Amili, vol, 2.pp.161-2; al-Khirsan, ibid, p, 362.
[709] Al-Saraj, 'A, *Al-Hakim*, ibid, pp.250-1; al-Khirsan, S, ibid, p.370.

purposely targeted the Shi'a merchants in the favor of the Sunni counterparts severely curtailing the influence of the Shi'a businessmen to a minimum. It should be noted here that while al-Bakir usually was regarded as a moderate person compared with his successor Saddam, the fact remains that the former had pursued an undiluted policy of repression towards Shi'a *marja'iyya* during 'Arif's days.

It is reported that al-Bakir, amongst other Sunni officers, had 'criticized [al]-Bazaz's policy…of running after the Shias'.[710] Like 'Abdul Salam 'Arif, al-Bakir was known for his conservative character, observant and hard Sunni believer.[711] Despite the fact that these policies were unprecedented; the worse was still to come.

Responding to this massive attack, al-Hakim resorted to his old tactic; first by utilising religious gatherings to denounce the government's policies. On 13 May 1969, a huge gathering in Imam 'Ali's Mosque in Najaf was addressed by al-Hakim accompanied by al-Khoei, al-Sadr and many other leading *'ulama*. In his speech, Mahdi al-Hakim explained the pivotal role of the *marja'iyya* plays in the people's life, how *marja'iyya* devotes itself to the needs of people in all times and most importantly about the governmental policies that targeted *marja'iyya*. Al-Hakim, who called upon the *umma* to consolidate its factions to confront the Zionist enemy, seems to have been endeavouring to send a reconciliation message that comes in line with the formal government policy.[712] It is interesting that while al-Hakim was insisting on confronting first the Ba'th regime, Khomeini called al-Hakim to halt his criticism of the Baghdad government in order to direct his attention to the Palestine question. According to Khomeini's supporters, any attack against the Ba'th government, which displays clear enmity to Israel, would weaken Muslims in the Palestine question.[713] Al-Hakim's statement, therefore, expressed a tempered criticism of Ba'th government policies and

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[710] FO 371/186743, British Embassy, Baghdad, 29 January, 1966.
[711] Khadduri, M, *Socialist Iraq*, *A Study in Iraqi Politics since 1968*, Middle East Institute, Washington, DC, 1978, pp.69-70.
[712] Al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.374-5.
[713] Al-'Amili, vol, 2, pp.207-8.

did not rule out the option of negotiation.

A large demonstration in Baghdad led by al-Hakim testified to his ability to galvanise followers and supporters within the very stronghold of the Ba'th regime. Clearly, the purpose of this visit to Baghdad was to organize meetings with delegates from the Iraqi cities who submitted their demands to al-Hakim. Thus, al-Hakim, in his turn, would raise the collected demands before the Ba'th government. Al-Hakim began receiving visits from government delegates, tribal leaders and influential figures.[714] Al-Hakim sent again on 5 June 1969 another statement that was aimed primarily at the resolution of the arising problems.[715] Considering its precarious position, al-Hakim's movement undoubtedly alarmed the Ba'th government. The Ba'th government, therefore, sought to appease al-Hakim while at the same time preparing for its next unpredictable action.

Once again, al-Hakim seems to have been willing to resolve the problems with the Ba'thists. For this purpose, he attempted to moderate his criticism towards the government by declaring that 'we have no intention to have power, seeking to serve Muslims wherever they lived and prevent Muslims from engaging in fighting inside and outside Iraq regardless of their nationalities…hoping that al-Bakir convinces his group to work in accordance with God's commands in the service of Muslim subjects.[716]

The Ba'th's answer, however, was unexpected and punitive one. On 9 June 1969, the Ba'th government broadcasted a testimony of a military officer who claimed the involvement of Mahdi al-Hakim in spying for Israel and his leading role in an attempt coup to topple the regime with the help of the CIA, Iran and Israel.[717] The broadcast was prepared carefully and intentionally shown at that moment to inflict a devastating defeat on the opponent. While Mahdi al-Hakim escaped arrest (he was in the Saudi Arabia for the *Haj*), the shock was enough to check al-Hakim's political movement. It

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[714] Al-Khirsan, S, ibid, pp.378-9

[715] Ibid, pp, 379-80.

[716] Al-Khirsan, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, ibid.p.159; idem, *Al-Sadr*, pp, 379-80.

[717] Al-Saraj, 'A, *Al-Hakim*, ibid, pp.254-5; Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, ibid,vol.2.p.24; al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.381-*2*.

is not clear whether the allegation was fabricated to engineer shock among the ranks of the supporters of al-Hakim or genuinely related in any way to the foiled coup of 'Abdul Ghani al-Rawi. Organized and supported by the Shah, al-Rawi's coup in effect was a serious attempt to bring down the Ba'th regime. The regime however, thanks to its intelligence agency, succeeded in infiltrating the plot and foiled its plans.[718]

Nevertheless, broadcasting this trial and accusing al-Hakim's son was a surprise blow that ended all efforts to ease the tensions between al-Hakim and Baghdad.[719] By linking the *marja'iyya* to an alleged Zionist conspiracy, the regime succeeded in denigrating Shi'a religious institution, rallying the support of Iraqi people against it. Nationalists and particularly the Iraqi Communists were overjoyed for discovering the alleged conspiracy and showed enthusiasm for searching al-Hakim's house whether in Kadhamayya or Najaf.[720] In fact, this moment was a time of vengeance for Communists who blamed al-Hakim for causing their downfall. Al-Hakim seems to have realized his powerless position with no ability to stand up to the regime. Furthermore, al-Hakim's close circle recognized their new critical situation. Many '*ulama* either fled Iraq like Murtada al-'Askari (al-Hakim's right hand) or became more inclined to submit to the belief that politics is better suited left outside the walls of the *hawza*.

Realizing the importance of bringing pressure on the Ba'th government and hoping to rally the support of Arabs and Muslims for *marja'iyya* in Najaf, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr went to Lebanon, where he orchestrated a political and media campaign. Letters dispatched to Jamal 'Abdel Naser, King Faysal of the Saudi Arabia as well as Abu al-'Ala al-Moudodi in Pakistan.[721] The campaign however brought about no real effect. It was clear that most Arab and Islamic states had no interest in interfering within Iraqi affairs on the side of al-Hakim. Al-Sadr himself admitted that the Iraqi regime had

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[718] Al-Khirsan, *Al-Sadr*, pp.406-7.
[719]Al-Khirsan, ibid, pp.403.
[720] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, p.164; al-Moman, 'A, ibid, p.100.
[721] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, p.393.

attracted many Shi'a '*ulama* to its side under the influence of its national propaganda.[722] No doubt, the Ba'th and other Arab nationalist movements had been more appeal among the Lebanese Shi'a during this period and nationalist ideas were still an efficient tool to win the hearts and minds of Arab people particularly those issues associated with Palestine. Thus, the Ba'th regime in Iraq radicalized its tone in this period so as to present itself as the chief bearer of Arab nationalist ideology and the main bastion of Arab unity. This explains the lukewarm response of the Shi'a people in Lebanon for the predicament facing al-Hakim.

Al-Hakim retreated to Najaf extremely demoralised. In an attempt to appease al-Hakim, mediators were commissioned by the Ba'th regime to reach a compromise between the two sides. Al-Hakim, however rejected all offers and abstained himself from any further political role. The impact of this incident had been far reaching and not confined to al-Hakim himself. Al-Hakim died on 27 Raba'i al-Awal 1390/2 May 1970. His funeral turned into an anti-Ba'th demonstration. Angry Shi'a protesters chanted slogans against al-Bakr, who participated himself in the funeral to show his respect for al-Hakim.[723]

By the time of the death of al-Hakim, the Shi'a *marja'iyya* came to its new phase. Probably best described as al-Hakim's epoch, between 1956 and 1970, it had witnessed a conspicuously an active role played by the *marja'iyya* in political affairs. Although this role had almost been in response to the events in Baghdad rather than initiated by an organized movement, it reflected pressing and burning issues that faced the Shi'a community in general. Al-Hakim and his close assistants were more concerned with religious rather than political goals that expressed their views. Al-Hakim's movement however did not always reflect the interests of the Shi'a community. Certainly, al-Hakim worked hard to present himself as a scholar for all Shi'a and Sunnis striking a

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[722] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp,387-98.

[723] Al-Saraj, 'A, *al-Imam al-Hakim*, ibid, p.258; al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, p.409.

balance with conflicting regional interests. Although al-Hakim showed charismatic and persuasive skills, he demonstrated very little pragmatic thinking. This doctrinal approach explains his precarious position towards the Ba'th regime especially over the continuing contest between Iraq and Iran. Clearly, an uncompromising doctrinal attitude did not effectively serve al-Hakim and the Shi'a community in Iraq as both Iraqi and Iranian governments determined the primacy of their national interest.

Najaf and Baghdad: from contest to concealment

The death of Sayyed al-Hakim opened the way for four candidates to hold the *marja'iyya* position. Besides Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, there were Yousif al-Hakim (al-Hakim's eldest and most learned son), 'Abdul Hadi al-Shirazi (d.1976) and Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. Meetings and discussion among *Ahl al-Khibrah* (people of experience) led to chose al-Khoei as the most learned *Mujtahid* in Najaf. As Sayyed Yousif al-Hakim showed no interest in the position (probably as a reflection of his father's defeat before the Ba'th government), the transition process was swift.The selection was also made easy thanks to the backing of al-Sadr, al-Khoei's close student.[724]

Al-Khoei, who was born into a *Sadah* family from Azerbaijan, Iran in 1889, received his early learning in Khoi (his birthplace) before emigrating to Najaf in 1911. At Najaf, he attended the lessons of high-ranking scholars like Shaikh al-Shari'a, Muhammad Hussain al-Na'ini, Dhiyae al-'Iraqi and many other leading *'ulama*. Regarded as a master of *Fiqh* and *usul al-Fiqh* in Najaf's *hawza*, al-Khoei was often described as a quietist and apolitical *mujtahid*. However, careful scrutiny into his life shows a more cautious attitude towards politics rather than absolute apathy. Although it is true to say that al-Khoei was a man of knowledge, he demonstrated nonetheless an unequivocal political role during Qasim's and 'Arif's eras, criticizing both Iraqi and Iranian

[724] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp.427-9.

authorities for neglecting Islam in favor of secular conventions. Al-Khoei turned to *Taqayya* (prudent dissimulation) as an alternative option after realizing the humiliating outcome of al-Hakim's failed confrontation with the governing Ba'th. It is said that al-Khoei may have advised al-Hakim to make a compromise with the Ba'th instead of confronting the regime.[725]

Al-Khoei found himself between two approaches: either to follow al-Hakim's defiant standing or to adopt more peaceful approach. For al-Khoei and other quietists, the lives of Shi'a Imams presented varied examples about the flexibility of means as every Imam acted according to the circumstances surrounding him. Although Imam 'Ali and Imam Hussain conducted an active path, most of the Shi'a Imams (Imam Hassan, 'Ali al-Sajad, al-Baqir, al-Sadiq and the rest of Imams) maintained an apolitical approach as the most effective way to preserve the integrity of the Shi'a. Confrontation therefore is not always *Wajib* (obligatory) to follow particularly with the lack of suitable conditions. Accommodation is possible, otherwise concealment is permitted for fear of losing one's life.[726]

On the ground, al-Khoei was torn as he was under the pressures of al-Sadr who advocated carrying on al-Hakim's unfinished war against the Ba'th regime and al-Khomeini who called for making settlement with the Ba'thists as long as they engaged in a long struggle with Israel.[727] Al-Khoei endeavoured to keep a balance between these two approaches with signs of leaning more towards this option or the other.

Al-Khoei's main concern had understandably been about how to protect the Najafi *hawza* from a secular regime patently intent to interfere with its affairs. Hundreds of students left or were expelled from Iraq under the pressure of the Ba'th regime leaving the entire *hawza* in danger. Al-Sadr, therefore urged al-Khoei to issue a statement that

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[725] Al-'Amili, vol, 2, p.206.
[726] See about *Taqaya*, for example, Enayat, H, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, ibid, pp.175-81; Momen, M, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, ibid, p.183.
[727] Al-'Amili, vol, 2.p.363.

ordered students not to leave Iraq. No doubt, al-Khoei's order softened the fear that spread among students and limited their movement to the minimum as they perceived that their situation had become unbearable.[728]

Al-Bakir received letters and petitions from Najaf's '*ulama* pleading with him to stop this unprecedented emigration from Iraq. At first sight, these letters may seem to have contributed in alleviating some of Baghdad pressures and saved the *hawza*. However, the Iraqi government felt now more confident to carry out its future plans as these letters displayed the weakness of the '*ulama* front and the incapacity to independently safeguard their own interests. Importantly, this moment reminds us of the *hawza* tragedy in 1923 when the Iraqi government forced al-Khalisi, al-Na'ini and al-Isfahani to leave Iraq and then allowed them to return under strict conditions.

Obviously, the Ba'th government reached the view that it accomplished the first step. Moreover, the Ba'th government took steps to bring under its control some of the *hawza's* responsibilities through checking the number of students inside Najaf. For this end, Baghdad conferred on both al-Khoei and Khomeini the right to issue the number of visas for foreign students.[729]

At the same time, the actions of the Baghdad government expressed a thinly veiled intention to dominate the *hawza* system. Envoys from Baghdad advocated in Najaf the right of the Iraqi government to interfere in the *hawza* affairs under the guise of developing its structure. The plan suggested designating a special committee, which would administer and direct the *marja'iyya'*s issues. Al-Khoei, however, showed defiant attitude towards these plans and asserted clearly that he would leave Iraq if the government insisted on implementing them.[730] If al-Khoei was indisputably the most learned *marja'i* in Najaf, he was nonetheless not the most trusted partner to Baghdad. Thus, al-Khoei's attitude towards Baghdad government was under close surveillance by

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[728] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp.450-1; al-Hussaini, M, *al-Imam Al-Sadr*, ibid.p.77.
[729] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, p.454.
[730] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp.474-5.

the Iraqi intelligence, checked and tested vis-à-vis Khomeini's action and the latter's favourable position by Baghdad.

The Ba'th, Khomeini and Iran: the enemy of my enemy

It seems that the presence of Ayatollah Khomeini added further pressure upon Najaf's '*ulama* particularly after mounting the regional contest between the Shah's regime and the Ba'th government. With the Ba'th holding power in Baghdad between 1970 and until the end of 1974, Khomeini was greatly supported in his continuing struggle against the Shah in Iran. The Ba'th government helped the Iranian opposition in establishing a radio network from 1972 until 1975 to attack the Shah's regime and Khomeini's supporters were moving freely under the auspicious of the Iraqi security forces.[731] This special treatment was a result of unwritten agreement made by Khomeini with the Ba'th that allowed the former to work openly against the Shah providing that he keep himself away from involving in the internal Iraqi affairs. As such, the Ba'th regime became now more capable to counter the Shah's support of Iraqi Kurdish rebels through its backing of Khomeini in Iraq.

For this end, the Iraqi government supported establishing a liaison office in Karbala, with the main task of the dissemination of the message of the Iranian '*ulama* opposing the Shah. An unknown Iraqi religious man called 'Abdul Latif al-Daraji, who circulated *Sout al-Islam* magazine (The Voice of Islam), was in charge of this office. Articles and statements published in the magazine to attack the Shah's regime and to generate the message of the Iranian *Mujahidin 'ulama* who undertook the task to defend the Iranian people against the Shah's tyranny. In the first issue, the magazine presented a profile about Khomeini together with the speeches of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakir and Saddam Hussain. The profile portrayed Khomeini as a lively embodiment of the *'ulama's* strife and their heroic standings in defending the dignity of the Iranian nation and *umma*'s

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[731] Najati, G, R, *Al-Tarikh al-Irani al-Mouser.Iran fi al-Asr al-Bahlawi*, Qum-2008, pp.330-5, pp.379-90, p.454; Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, p.348.

pride'.[732] The magazine also reported the news of demonstrations and insurgent activities against the Shah's government carried out by Iranians and the Arab community in *Ahwaz* region.[733] The magazine reflected undoubtedly the opinions and orders of the Iraqi regime. It was clear that the Ba'th regime was striving to gain strategic parity with Iran through mobilizing the Iranian opposition groups against the regime of the Shah.

The agreement between Khomeini and Baghdad authorities came to a real test in 1971 when pressure was exerted on Khomeini to interfere on behalf of his Iranians fellows, who were forced to leave Iraq. As Najaf '*ulama* were not in a position to alter the Ba'th policy of expulsion, some '*ulama* called upon Khomeini to use his excellent relations with the regime to halt maltreatment of Iranian religious students. Khomeini, however, was cautious in his actions as he did not want to jeopardise his agreement.[734]

Exile in Najaf seems to have been added an ultra revolutionary tone to Khomeini's plan to the extent that it transformed him from a moderate *Mujtahid* into a radical cleric. Despite the fact that this shift did not take place overnight, it nonetheless corresponded to his new political and religious circumstances. It was not surprising that during these years Khomeini delivered his lectures on what has become to be known as *Walayat al-Faqeeh* (the Government of the Jurist). Khomeini started his lectures/lessons on 21 January 1970/ 14 Thi al-Qia'da 1389. In theses lessons, Khomeini put forward that '*ulama* should lead Muslims in their struggle against their oppressive rulers. In addition to their role as spiritual leaders and guardians of Islam, Khomeini held that the *'ulama* must take political action as an integral part of their responsibility. In this sense, Khomeini reversed the traditional Shi'a view concerning politics. Rather than waiting for the Hidden Imam to establish an Islamic state, learned *fuqaha* (sin. *faqeeh*) are now authorized to carry out this mission. Politics, therefore, is no longer relegated to lay

[732] *Sout al-Islam*, No, 1, 2, 3, 1973, p.17.
[733] *Sout al-Islam*, No, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1973, pp.196-201.
[734] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp.432-3.

people and secular movements. Clergymen, accordingly, are not permitted to take refuge in *Taqayya* for fear of their governments.[735]

Although the lectures were addressing the whole Muslims, it was clear that they were more concerned with raising the awareness of the oppressed Iranian people to go against the dictatorship of the Shah.[736] Hence, the lectures were designed to voice the opposition of the Iranians against the Shah in a powerful political and religious language. Khomeini put his lessons in a language loaded with uncomprising rhetoric and religious symbolism. Evidently, the chief target of these lessons was the monarchal regime of the Shah, which was fervently condemned for its role in westernizing Iranian society and most importantly for permitting foreign states to exploit Iran. Israel, colonialism and imperialism were the main foreign powers that Khomeini called upon Muslim to challenge them.[737] No doubt, these powers were the common foe of both the Ba'th regime and Khomeini. And there was no reason for the Ba'th not to support and aid Khomeini against the enemies of the Arab nation.

Khomeini's views, on the other hand, antagonized the mainstream clergy in Najaf for both theoretical and practical reasons. On the one hand, Khomeini was departing from the traditional Shi'a doctrine that gives no such responsibility for *'ulama*. Most significantly, was Khomeini's criticism of the '*ulama* for adopting *Taqayya*.

Najafi *'ulama*, on their part, may have considered Khomeini's call as irrelevant to them as Khomeini was merely prioritizing his religious and doctrinal appeals to suit his political conditions. Furthermore, Khomeini was in Najaf and experienced no harassment or persecution similar to that carried out by the Ba'th regime against Najafi *'ulama*. Actually, Najafi '*ulama* duly criticised Khomeini for his excellent relations with the Ba'th while at the same time demanding the Shi'a *'ulama* to cooperate with

[735] Al-Imam al-Khomeini, *al-Hekomah al-Islamayya*, Beirut-1979, pp134-9; Martin, V, *Creating an Islamic State, Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, pp.119-22.
[736] Al-Imam al-Khomeini, ibid, pp.120-2; Akhavi, S, *Religion and Politics*, ibid.pp.163-6.
[737] Al-Khomeini, ibid, pp.20-2 & pp.108-14; Keddi, N, *Modern Iran*, ibid, pp.192-3.

this regime, turning a blind eye for its atrocities against them. There is good ground to assume that Najafi ‘*ulama* regarded Khomeini’s call as a pragmatic program, conditioned by his circumstances rather than a genuine and scholarly inferred thesis expounded for all Muslims. This partially explains why Khomeini’s lessons received very little attention within the Najaf’s *hawza*. However, this was mainly due to the fact that the lectures were delivered in Persian language mostly for Iranian students and in a very critical time. The Iranian ‘*ulama* in Najaf were almost divided over these lessons mainly for political reasons. Muhammad al-Ruhani who recently emigrated to Najaf from Iran (may be by the request of the Shah) was very critical to Khomeini and attempted to divert the attention of the Iranian students.[738]

Invariably, the hostile regional rivalry between Iraq and Iran caused Najaf’s ‘*ulama* to show patterns of political behaviors and maneuvers suited to their varied positions. Even so, showing their support for Baghdad regime seems to have been the only option left for Najaf ‘s ‘*ulama* bearing in mind that Arab states (including Iraq) were engaging in a war against Israel. During the Arab-Israel war of 1973, the Shi’i *‘ulama* found themselves compelled to side with the Ba’th regime, which sent the Iraqi Army to defend front-line Arab territories. Whereas the majority of ‘*ulama* prayed for a victory over the Israelis, they did not go as far as to support the Iraqi government. Khomeini however went further to declare *jihad* in order to liberate Palestine, calling for solidarity and unity among Muslims and to attack American and Zionist interests in the region. Khomeini expressed his thanks for the Iraqi government and all other Arab and Islamic states for their contribution in this decisive battle against Israel.[739] Khomeini issued another statement directed specifically to the Iranian peoples, urging them not to stand neutral between the Arabs and Israel but to side with their Arab brothers.[740]

This atmosphere, where conflicting interests prevailed amongst the *‘ulama*, undoubtedly

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[738] Al-Amili, A, ibid, vol,2, pp.262-3.
[739] *Sout al-Islam*, No, 4, 5, 6.1973.pp.180-94.
[740] *Sout al-Islam*, ibid, p.195-7.

served the Ba'th government, giving it an ideal opportunity to devote its security forces to persecute Iraqi Islamist activists. While Baghdad silenced the Shi'a *'ulama's* front using the coercive machinery of the state and temporary arrangements, the main task was how to handle the militant wing of Shi'a community. Settlement had been impossible, hence the adoption of heavy-handed policing.

Al-Sadr, the Da'wa and the Ba'th: the first phase 1970-1976

The Ba'th policies towards the *marja'iyya* in Najaf led to the successful exclusion of the Shi'a activists, cutting them from any support and opening the way for supplanting their influence. This occurred simultaneously with the weakness of the Da'wa itself as it was passing through unmanageable dilemmas regarding the nature of its relationship with the *marja'iyya* in Najaf coupled with the emerging of new rival group among the Shi'a community in Karbala. These factors together undermined the Da'wa movement's stance and placed it in defensive position.

As noted earlier, the Da'wa maintained good relations with al-Hakim though its independent approach widened the gap between the two sides. This phase culminated in the previously mentioned *fatwa* that prohibited any connection to the Da'wa for the fear of leading the Shi'a community astray. This remained so since 'Arif's reign until the death of Sayyed al-Hakim in 1970. Nonetheless, al-Hakim's death had been a notable blow for the Da'wa. It is worth noting that the Ba'th government did not conduct any arrests during al-Hakim's years. As the Iraqi security agencies were collecting more information about the Da'wa itself, eradicating dissent among Shi'a political groups was deferred to the next stage.

In fact, since Qasim's era, the Ba'th constructed an accurate picture about the presence of active Shi'a political groups working mainly between Najaf and Baghdad. This picture became more discernible during the days of 'Abdul Rahman 'Arif, who showed

tolerance towards the Shi'a activities.[741] Ba'thists raised suspicion about al-Sadr's activities and linked them to the rising Shi'a groups. Thus, the Iraqi security agencies endeavoured to detect the Shi'a networks throughout Iraq.

The Ba'th regime began its crackdown against Shi'a activists immediately after the death of al-Hakim. As the Da'wa activists were severed from the support of Shi'a*'ulama*, it became much easier for the Ba'th regime to come down hard on its activities. Thus, between 1970 and 1976, the Da'wa became the main target of the Ba'th security agencies. Inevitably, this happened as the cleavages between *marja'iyya* and the Da'wa became obvious for both political and religious differences.

As stated earlier, the question of leadership formed one of the most contentious issues that challenged the Da'wa party throughout its existence. Theoretically, the Da'wa was insisting on distinguishing between two types of leadership: the *'ulama'*s specific role in issuing religious *fatwa* and the policy direction, where political decision is made according to the party's view. Although the members of the movement were free to follow any *mujtahid* on the religious issues, it is the movement that possesses the authority to formulate and apply policy. The issue of following the most suitable *marja'i* was to be revived again with the coming of al-Khoei to the influential position of *marja'iyya*.[742]

Despite of his apolitical approach, al-Khoei ostensibly had been not negative towards the Da'wa. It is said that al-Khoei even defended establishing an Islamic party as a new tool to resist secular encroachment though similar to his predecessor al-Hakim; he was neither interested nor believing in Islamic politics or parties.[743] It is reported that al-Khoei himself stated during the smear offensive that targeted Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr

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[741] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, p.85; al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid.p.174.
[742] Hizb al-Da'wa, *Thaqafat al-Da'wa.al-Qism al-Tandhimi*, vol, 1, pp.15-6; *Thaqafat al-Da'wa.al-Qism al-Siyyasi*, vol, 1.pp.258-62; Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamayya.Tarikh Mushriq wa Tayar fil al-Umma*, vol, 1 12/10/1957-17/07/1968, pp.178-80.
[743] A-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, p.517; Al-Hussaini, M, *Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr*, p.95.

that he is pleased to join any party formed by al-Sadr.[744] Again, al-Khoei's opinions were an echo of the commonly held views of a non-political tradition and the new realities in the ground that resulted from al-Hakim's confrontation with the Ba'th regime.

The Da'wa was shocked when the Iraqi security agencies arrested Abu Issam al-Dekhil on 28 September 1971, the then second most senior in the Da'wa hierarchy. Although the regime did not obtain any information from al-Dekhil, this act was devastating for the Da'wa. Al-Dekhil was brutally tortured and eventually executed at the hands of Nadim Gizar, a Shi'a from Nassirayya, who would later lead an unsuccessful coup to overthrow the regime itself, and was subsequently killed.[745]

This was followed by mass arrests of those suspected to be in the Da'wa party in Najaf, Karbala, Diwanayya, Hilla, Simawa and Nassirayya. Security agencies subjected Da'wa members to torture and mistreatment in order to attain information about the leading figures in the Party. However, the leader of the Da'wa Muhammad Hadi al-Sibaiti (Abu Hassan) escaped arrest as he was abroad.[746] The Da'wa received a heavy blow in Basrah when the security agencies revealed its entire networks. Basrah in fact had a vast number of members and supporters. The campaign of mass arrests continued to include now the second person in the Da'wa who took al-Dekhil place, Shaikh Arif al-Basri, its most active member. Al-Basri was captured on 17 July 1974 when he was about to leave Iraq to Egypt. Besides al-Basri, the security agencies arrested other leading members: Nuri Tuma'a, 'Imad al-Din al-Tabatabaei, Izul Din al-Qubanchi and Hussain Chilookhan. Arif al-Basri and his companions (best-known as *Qabtat al-Huda* [Fist of the Guidance] in the Da'wa literature), were executed in 1974 in spite of the demands

[744] Shubar, H, ibid, p.112 & p.138.
[745] Al-Khirsan, *Hizb*, pp.175-6; al-Momin, A, pp.113-4. See about Gizar, Kelidar, A, *Iraq: the Search for Stability*, London-1975, p.9.
[746] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid, p.179.

and petitions to release them.[747] Targeting the Da'wa became the main preoccupation of the Ba'th security forces from beginning of 1970s until the downfall of the Saddam's regime in 2003. Heavy- handed policies seem to have been exhausted the Da'wa and cost it dearly. The scale of onslaught on the Da'wa Party is only comparable to the campaign that experienced by the ICP during and following the 1963 coup.

Realizing that neither Khoei nor Khomeini was ready to jeopardize their positions as a result of any conflict with the Ba'th, the Da'wa approached al-Sadr again in an attempt to generate the call for his *marja'iyya*. It is worth noting here that contrary to the common held view, the Da'wa had very little connection with Khomeini. Despite their convergent views (as both adhered to a new politicized Islam), the Da'wa and Khomeini were pursuing different paths. The Da'wa, in effect, was close to the Najafi *hawza* and its members generally followed one of its great *mujtahids*. At the heart of their conflict was Khomeini's friendly relationship with the Ba'th until 1975.[748] From this date on, however, Khomeini's activities were brought to a minimum upon the request of the Shah's government as part of the Algerian agreement signed between the Shah and Saddam Hussain in March 1975. It is clear whether the Ba'th had any involvement in the assassination of Khomeini's eldest son, Mustafa, who was killed on 23 November 1977. The Ba'th agencies either carried the assassination or provided the SAVAK with help as the perpetrators escaped easily from Iraq. The assassination was certainly a message of a new era, where Khomeini was subjected to pressure from both the Ba'th and the Shah.

Living amid this threatening atmosphere, al-Sadr undertook a cautious policy towards the Da'wa. In fact, al-Sadr's reluctant attitude was related to his intention to evade the Ba'th security forces as some detainees pointed to the influence of al-Sadr. For this

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[747] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, p.202; al-Momin, 'A, pp.118-22; al-'Amili, vol, 3, pp.74-83.

[748] Da'wa literature that appeared after the Iranian Revolution attempts to present a good account of relation between the Party and Khomeini. See for example, Hassan Shubar interview in *al-Mawqif*, No, 219; al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.63-5 & pp.102-3.

reason, security agencies targeted first al-Sadr's close associates like Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim and Mahmood al-Hashimi. Al-Sadr was then arrested on 12 August 1972 and released shortly as there was no enough information against him and due to pressures from Najaf's *'ulama*.[749] Most significant, al-Sadr's cautious attitude should be considered in light of the struggle over the *marja'iyya's* position.

Al-Sadr and the road to *Marja'iyya*

Al-Sadr, who began thinking seriously about *marja'iyya* after the death of al-Hakim, may have arrived at the conclusion that his position was at bay as a result of his political activities. Al-Sadr, therefore, gradually distanced himself from political activities as non-political conduct was regarded as one of the principal requirements for those *Mujtahids* yearning to be considered for *marja'iyya*. No doubt, al-Sadr's reputation as a great *Mujtahid* seems to have been tainted by his previous political activities. Al-Sadr thus started his *marja'iyya* by following the traditional way; paying visits to people, distributing stipends to students[750] and finally writing his main jurisprudence book *al-Fatawa al-Wadhiha* (the Clear Decrees). While al-Sadr's *marja'iyya* was expanding steadily, his critics and rivals raised again the issue of al-Sadr's political record. Some Najafi scholarly circles pointed to previous political activities conducted by al-Sadr seemingly to disapprove his claim for *marja'iyya*. In this climate, most criticisms leveled at al-Sadr aimed at undermining his standing for this position.[751]

Consequently, al-Sadr inclined towards a conservative attitude between 1970 and 1976 bringing his movement close to the traditional line of *marja'iyya*. Like his mentor al-Khoei who adopted obvious concealing approach, al-Sadr too resorted to concealing in dealing with the Ba'th regime. Under these circumstances, al-Sadr even subscribed to a new line of thinking. On the one hand, he advocated a peaceful approach, calling for

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[749] See al-Haeri, K, *al-Shahid Al-Sadr, Semou al-Dhat wa Semou al-Mouqif*, Qum-1427.pp.147-9; al-Moman, 'A, p.114; al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, pp.180-1; al-Hussaini, M, ibid.p.95.

[750] Al-Amili, vol, 3, pp.111-5.

[751] Al-Amili,vol,3, pp.123-31.

moderate means to protect the Islamic community. Al-Sadr propagated these views in a book that expresses best his new position entitled *Ahlul al-Bayt: Tanoua' Adwar wa Wahdat Hadaf* (House of the Prophet: varied roles and unified goal). Al-Sadr maintains in this collection of lectures that the Shi'a Imams followed a variety of paths, depending on their political situations, to preserve the integrity of the Shi'a community. According to al-Sadr:

'Peaceful means of resisting coercion might be the best political option since it would not bring a threat to the Islamic movement. Some of the Holy Imams resorted to supplication, others turned to the teaching of *fiqh* and *Sunna*, while others accepted minor political roles in order to overcome tyrannical oppression against the Shi'i'.[752]

Regardless of their religious and doctrinal content, the underlying message behind these lectures was the political dilemma of al-Sadr was personally experiencing. Al-Sadr who found himself between the hammer and the anvil; on one side he was under increasing pressure from Shi'a activists who were calling for an assertive attitude and on the other, the demands of the Iraqi government to maintain a cordial stance, resorted to a cautious posture.

More important and instead of his previous theory, which served the Da'wa line, al-Sadr propagated what he called *al-Marja'yya al-Mawdu'yya* (the Objective *Marja'iyya*). According to the thesis put forward by al-Sadr, *marja'iyya* should be transformed from its traditional individualistic form into an institutionalized, well-organized and reformed body. In addition to the *marja'i* who presides over the top of religious hierarchy, (al-Sadr does not raise any objections regarding the traditional way of choosing the *marja'i*), al-Sadr advised the creation of new specialist and professional committees providing *marja'iyya* with expertise and proposals. Ranging from educational, intellectual and external relations, these committees were to be responsible

[752] Al-Sadr, M, B, *Ahlul al-Bayt: Tanoua' Adwar wa Wahdat Hadaf*, Dar al-Taruf, Beirut, 1990. pp.67-8, pp.141-7; 'Aziz,T, ibid, p.47. See also Malat, S, *Religious Militancy in Contemporary Iraq*, ibid, 717-8.

for planning, research and organising the work of *marja'iyya* to continue its function even in the absence of the *marja'i*.[753]

At first glance, this thesis seems to have been more concerned with *marja'iyya* itself. Indeed, al-Sadr who was on his way to announce publicly his *marja'iyya*, attempted to propose a reformed and updated structure for this traditional institution. Al-Sadr did not fail to notice how political developments had seriously affected the institution of *marja'iyya* in modern life and its various personal responses to the changing circumstances.

Without doubt, al-Sadr advocated *al-Marja'iyya al-Mawdu'iyah* as a genuine substitution to lead Shi'a community. However, while al-Sadr places the blame on traditional *marja'iyya* for not taking the initiative to lead of *umma*, he implicitly criticizes the Da'wa for underestimating the leading role of the *'ulama*. Al-Sadr, in this sense, awarded the mantle of authority to the *marja'iyya* rather than the Islamic party (the Da'wa in this regard), to lead Shi'a community in this time. Despite the fact that this new thesis represented a shift in al-Sadr's thinking, it was still one-step short from al-Khomeini's concept of *Wilayat al-Fiqih*.

As a result of this line of thought, al-Sadr had come to the view of a separation between *hawza* studies and political activities (mainly applicable to the Da'wa Party). Al-Sadr therefore called on his students to conduct themselves according to the apolitical ethos of the *hawza* rather than the party directions. Answering a question concerning the membership of religious students within Islamic parties, al-Sadr declared that:

'It is not permitted for religious student to join the Islamic parties as the function of student is preaching for guidance according to the traditional practice adhered to by the *'ulama*'.[754]

As a consequence, many students left the Da'wa, devoting themselves entirely to

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[753] 'Aziz, T, ibid, pp.287-97.See the full text of this thesis in al-Numani, M R, *Shaheed al-Umma*, ibid, vol, 1, pp.263-72; al-Haeri, K, *Al-Shahid Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.127-40.
[754] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, p.201; al-Amili, vol.3, p.63; al-Hussaini, M T, *Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.124-37; Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, vol, 2.ibid, pp98-106.

hawza studies. The Da'wa, however, felt targeted by this new ruling considering its timing. The new ruling was issued amid intensifying harsh acts taken by the Iraqi government against the Da'wa activists. While al-Sadr's main intention was to relieve external pressure from the government, the government itself used this religious ruling as a proof against Shi'a political activists.[755]

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the tension between al-Sadr and the Da'wa reached its peak when Da'wa activists attempted to recruit more students from *hawza* to join their group. Furiously offended by this action, al-Sadr strongly criticized the party and emphasised once again his call to *hawza* students to abandon political activities as he received information warning him of government security surveillance targeting his house. Al-Sadr repeatedly encouraged his students to leave Da'wa and even went further to prevent any activist from visiting his home. The new announcement angered the Da'wa members who accused al-Sadr of being under the pressure of the Iraqi government. Some of them left his lessons; others went as accusing him of being a collaborator with the Ba'th regime.[756]

Nonetheless, it is not certain whether the al-Sadr's new line disclosed his genuine belief or was mere a temporary tactic to ease the pressure on him from both the *hawza* and the government. Al-Sadr, who was admitted recently into the *marja'iyya*, started to pay more attention to the concerns of Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf especially within al-Khoei's circle.[757] In fact, al-Sadr maintained good relation with his mentor al-Khoei, who held him in high esteem. However, signs of rivalry soon found its way as al-Sadr started gradually move to assume *marja'iyya*. Thus, al-Sadr became subject to an intense campaign of smear and slur led mainly by some of al-Hakim's relatives and from al-Khoei's close circle. The concerns revolved around two issues: al-Sadr's claim for

[755] Al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*.pp.201-2.
[756] Al-'Amili, vol, 3, pp.65-9.
[757] Al-'Amili, vol, 3, pp.123-34; al-Hussaini, M, *al-Imam Al-Sadr*, ibid, p.83; al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.472-3.

marja'iyya and his political activities. In fact, the latter issue raised by al-Sadr's critics flowed from the former. This campaign annoyed al-Sadr, who abruptly stopped his lessons, declaring that he is no longer interested in teaching and advised his students to search for another *mujtahid*.[758]

At the same time, Baghdad began to bridge its links with al-Sadr immediately after the short detention in August 1972. From then onwards, Baghdad's representatives were trying hard to induce al-Sadr to their side using the carrot and the stick approach. On the one hand, they strived to highlight al-Sadr's political activities, warning that the government would not tolerate such activities in the future; on the other hand, they offered support to al-Sadr to be considered for *marj'ayya* as the best Arab candidate so as to end the dominance of the Persian *'ulama*.[759] Baghdad's representatives from the RCC, RL and other important figures often paid visits to al-Sadr to win his loyalty. Zaid Haidar, a Shi'a Lebanese member of the RC, Hassan al-'Amiri, a Shi'a member (from Karbala) of RCC and many governmental visitors came to Najaf to meet al-Sadr. Ba'th's representatives were clearly pushing to support al-Sadr's *marja'iyya* against other leading *'ulama*. Al-Sadr, however, was aware of this maneuver and was trying from his side to use this opportunity to implement his innovative conception of the *marja'iyya* through extending his intellectual and religious activities. No doubt, al-Sadr's evolving relations with the Iraqi government made him cautious towards any political activities and encouraged his adversaries to escalate their attacks against him.[760] It is worth noting here that this tactic was to be imitated later by Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (assassinated by the Baghdad regime in 1999), who used Baghdad's relative tolerance towards him as a bridge to propagate his message to Shi'a followers.

The Da'wa dilemma

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[758] Al-'Amili, vol, 3.pp.112-43; al-Hussaini, M,ibid,82-3; idem, *Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp184-5.

[759] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp.482-6; al-Numani, M R, ibid, pp.281-3.

[760] Al-Amili,vol.3.pp.67-9.

Contributing further to the leadership confusion, the Da'wa had to confront a genuine Shi'a challenge; that is the emerging of new Shi'a rival at the heart of Karbala. It was there, that the Da'wa met formidable resistance from the Islamic Action Organization, the new Shi'a group formed and headed by the Shirazi *'ulama*. Established in 1970s, this group in effect mainly congregated around Karabali '*ulama* and young activists from Karbala in order to challenge the regime in Baghdad. The group, however, competed with Da'wa over attracting the Shi'a youths in Karbala in particular. On contrast to the Da'wa, which increasingly distanced itself from clerics, the Karbalai group overemphasised the leadership of *'ulama*. While Hassan al-Shirazi (the chief ideologue of the group who was killed by the Baghdad security forces in Beirut in 1980), rejected the idea of an Islamic party, he held the view that the *fuqaha* should take the lead for Shi'a community.[761] *Fuqaha*, according to al-Shirazi, whose position closely resembles Khomeini's *Wilayat al-Fiqeeh*, are the sole leaders of *umma*. However, it is not clear whether Khomeini influenced al-Shirazi or the latter sought to regenerate his family's political role traced back to Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi and many other leading figures.[762]

Actually the historic local traditional rivalry between Karbala and Najaf had been present at the heart of the conflict between the Shirazi's group and Da'wa. Nonetheless, Hassan al-Shirazi himself seems to have kept close affiliation to Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim. Al-Hakim, for instance, condemned the imprisonment of al-Shirazi by the Ba'th regime in 1970.[763] Al-Shirazi and subsequently the IAO were concerned over the activities of the Da'wa and its view of the *'ulama* leadership. This attitude outraged the Shirazi *'ulama*, who condemned Da'wa for its perceived heretical program. Most

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[761] Al-Shirazi, H, *Kalimat al-Islam*, Qum-1400 A.H.pp.97-122 & 137-59; al-Haeri, M A (editor), *Ayotollah al-Udhma al-Sayyed Muhammad al-Hussain al-Shirazi.Khawatir Wa Dhikrayat*, pp.351-61; al-Katib, A, *Al-Shirazi, al-Marja'iyya fi Muwajahat Tehideyat al-Tadhawir*, London, 2002, p.46 & pp.69-91.

[762] Al-Katib, A, ibid, p.6 & pp.69-70. For different view see, Jabar, F, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, ibid, pp.218-9.

[763] Al-Katib, A, ibid, p.42; al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid.p.378.

importantly, this rivalry was exploited by Ba'thists to enlarge the gap between the two parties (the Da'wa and the IAO). In an anonymous statement circulated in mid 1970s in Najaf and Karbala, the Da'wa was attacked for disobeying the orders of al-Hakim, its negative role against the *marja'iyya* and support given to al-Sadr. More interestingly, the statement placed the blame on Da'wa for unduly provoking al-Hakim to confront the Ba'th government, which resulted in these catastrophic tragedies.[764] While the Ba'th regime played a role in playing these two Shi'a movements against each other in order to weaken their activities, ideological and personal differences were certainly present between Da'wa and the IAO.

Despite its relative success in recruiting Shi'a youth, Da'wa remained an almost elitist movement. Elitism represented one of the main weaknesses that characterized the Da'wa Party. However, it must be noted that this feature was mainly due to the fact that the party was born and developed as a secret group working underground to escape Baghdad's secret services. This atmosphere denied the party solid good grass-root support among the Shi'a community in particular. In contrast to the ICP, which built mass networks among workers, peasants and students, the Da'wa remained limited to *hawza* student and at best to Shi'a youths at Universities in Baghdad. This is also true with regard to its lack of military support though for obvious reason; the Iraqi military was a Sunni club. Moreover, this feature was bluntly revealed during the preceding years as well in forthcoming events.[765]

Additionally, Da'wa failed to develop a distinctive Iraqi national identity. Like other Islamic groups, the Da'wa essentially did not develop a realistic and pragmatic approach. Indeed, Abu Hassan al-Sibaiti expressed and maintained an indisputable Iraqi line, distancing Da'wa from the Iranian influences yet this attempt was brought to its end after the success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Embracing an Islamic religious

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[764] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid. For the full statement, see document, No.102.pp.833-5.
[765] See Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, v*ol*, 1.p.363 & 368-80.

discourse, Da'wa maintained a universal ideology that rested on ecumenical conceptions divorced from the party's immediate context. As such, the Da'wa party's ideology remained until recently similar to any other Sunni Islamic groups, expressing a very vague attitude towards problematic and sensitive political issues such as nationalism, Arabism and so on.[766] Da'wa, for instance, adopted the classical juristic terminology based on old and rigid religious thinking. According to this terminology, people are classified into two groups: Muslims and non-Muslims. The Da'wa literature depicts all adversaries like Communists and Ba'thists as disbelievers, hypocrites and apostates. Concomitantly, they are treated like any enemy of Islam subjected to the laws of the *Shar'iah* during times of war and peace.[767]

Rigid conceptions restricted and confined the Da'wa ideology only to a small minority of Shi'a practicing people. If the Da'wa party's Islamic ideology had been attractive especially for non-Iraqis (who constituted a sizeable element within the rank and file of the party), [768] Iraqi Shi'is kept aloof from the Da'wa for what considered as its excessive Islamic tone, which neglected twin tropes of Iraqi nationalism and Arabism though they shared some of the party's demands. For Iraqi Shi'is, Islam or Shi'ism did not prevent them from favouring Arab people at the expense of their Shi'a followers of non-Arab origin. Divergent attitudes over political directions were deep rooted and clear between the Iranian Shi'a '*ulama* and Iraqi Shi'a masses since the beginning of the 20th century and this became sharper with the spreading of nationalist ideas among Shi'a educated classes. It is reported that Shi'a tribal leaders of Najaf and the Middle Euphrates were in conflict with Shaikh Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi, who nominated an Iranian figure for the new Iraqi state after the Iraqi Revolution of 1920.[769] However,

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[766] See for example, Baram, A, The Radical Shi'ite Opposition Movement in Iraq, pp.99-100, in Silvan, E & Friedman, M (editors), ibid.pp.95-125.
[767] Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamayya, *Thaqafat al-Da'wa al-Islamayya*, *al-Qism al-Siyasi*, (2 vols), vol,1.p.34.
[768] See for example, Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, ibid, vol.1.pp.125-6.
[769] Al-Haeri, M A (editor), *Ayatollah*, ibid, pp.70-2.

even during the rising tide of Arab nationalism, some Shi'a '*ulama* (particularly of non-Iraqi origin) turned a deaf ear to the Arab sentiments of Iraqi people. Further, some Iranian '*ulama* considered Iraq to be part of Iran and Baghdad as a Persian city.[770]
Moreover, the rigidity of the Da'wa ideology contributed in widening the gap between this important Shi'a group and other secular though indigenous Iraqi grouping like the ICP. Both Da'wa and the ICP exchanged accusations and condemned each other for ideological and historical reasons. In contrast to Khomeini who kept away from raising any ideological questions that would deepen discord rather than unity, neither the Shi'a movement nor the ICP worked towards constructing a united front against the Ba'th regime. Certainly, historic grievances played a part in this conflict as both movements placed the blame on the other part for being the prime mover behind the other misfortune. While Iraqi Communists regarded the Shi'a *marja'iyya* and Islamists in general as being the primary culprits in the preparation for the 1963 coup, the Shi'a Islamists accused the ICP for its involvement in the Ba'th government and its agitating role against the Shi'a Islamic movement.[771]

Particular neglect on the part of the Shi'a *marja'iyya* to utilise their historical relation with the Kurds was also conspicuous. Moral and religious support displayed by Najaf towards the Kurdish question exerted heavy pressure on the shoulders of the central government of Baghdad in the previous years. Al-Hakim, however, did not coordinate Najaf's position with the Kurds during the summer of 1969 and afterwards. Mullah Mustafa al-Barazani, on his part, concluded a settlement with Baghdad in the beginning of 1970, without any acknowledgment of Shi'a concerns. Al-Barazani, however, was to face later al-Hakim's earlier fate as he forced to flee Kurdistan, dying in his exile in the USA in 1979. Despite their good relation, both the Kurds and Shi'a made their own decision without giving consideration to the other's interests, which severely weakened

[770] See the conversation between Muhammad al-Hussaini al-Shirazi and an Iraqi nationalist in the mid of 1970s in Haeri, M, A. ibid.pp.264-7.
[771] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid.pp.135-6.

their position in negotiation with Baghdad.

Inasmuch as this divide caused deep and chronic divergence between the main Iraqi opposition groups, it served the Ba'th interests, which became the dominant Iraqi power. The Ba'th, in its turn, deployed its arsenal of ideological weapons and propaganda to marginalize other movements, denouncing them as sectarian or unfaithful to Iraq. In fact, the Ba'th succeeded in disseminating its lofty but vague ideals among the Iraqi masses. Makaya correctly asserted that:

'Ba'thists ideology, which can hardly be pinned down to a real social class in the absence of a singular Arab society, is about fabricating a parochial world view made up exclusively of social myths. These myths are culled from Arab and Islamic tradition, and organized intellectually with the help of a host of concepts borrowed from the Left. Arab unity, freedom, Arab socialism, and the struggle against imperialism and Zionism are some of the catchwords of the mythology. The combination of myths and organizing concepts like imperialism acts as a filter in relation to the outside and provide a model not for what Arab society is, or what it might realistically change into, but what it is willed into becoming'.[772]

Consequently, secular movements (including the Ba'th) remained the favourite choice for most Shi'a people. This is even true with regard to the Shi'a faithful who, it would have seemed, ought to have constituted the main backbone of the Da'wa party. Even among this large section, the Da'wa seems to have attracted very little support, though supportors were completely alienated by the policies pursued by Baghdad. The Najaf's uprising of 1977 provides an exemplary example of the effects of this alienation.

Najaf's uprising of 1977

After it seized power, the Ba'th tried to display a constructive attitude towards Shi'a traditions and symbols. For this purpose, the regime adopted a moderate line regarding *Ashura* rituals for obvious political reasons. In 1968, Baghdad Radio broadcasted the *'Ashura* story (known as *Maqtal*) during *Muharam*, giving the impression that the

[772] Makaya, K (Samir al-Khalil), *Republic of Fear*, ibid, pp.74-5.

regime honoured Shi'a people and their customs. This tactic, however, did not last long as the regime reversed its policies and began to cracking down on Shi'i *'ulama*, religious institutions and including traditional Shi'a rituals.

As a staunchly secular party, the Ba'th adopted a policy of curtailment towards *Muharam* observances, which it considered to be reactionary traditions. However, the regime resorted first to interfere with these observances using rewards and promotions strategy to induce people stand behind these annual ceremonies. Money and other rewards were allocated for poets and preachers to praise the Ba'th leadership for accomplishing great achievements for Iraq and the Arab nation.[773] This developed into a ban or restriction on some rituals. The new line however met with protest and resistance and failed to bring an abrupt end to these enduring traditions particularly within Najaf community. The first protest took place in 1969 when the local government in Najaf tried to regulate *Muharam* observances. In the view of Najafis, however, the action was perceived as an attempt to get rid of *Muharam* commemorations altogether. Strong opposition by Najafis must be seen in the context of the escalation of hostility by the government against al-Hakim and the whole Shi'a community. Security procedures that targeted broad segments of the Shi'a population, in no small part, also helped fuel popular opposition. Expulsion of religious students and the execution of Shi'a merchants including the wealthy businessman of Pakistani origin 'Abdul Hussain Gita, directly contributed to the mass protest that took place at the eve of the tenth day of *Muharam*. Protesters chanted anti-Ba'th slogans and attacked the governor of Najaf and his local assistants.[774]

Historically, Najaf had long been the main centre of Shi'a ceremonies and *Muharam* traditions constituted an essential part of its culture. While the Ba'th succeeded in

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[773] Author's personal experience. For example, poets composed poems to praise al-Bakir, Saddam Hussain for solving the Kurdish question and nationalizing the oil supplies of Iraqi.
[774] *Al-Iraq bayn al-Madhi wa-l Hadhir wa-l Mustaqbal*, ibid, pp.889-90; Al-Moman, 'A, pp, 130-1; al-Amili, vol, 2, p.159.

scraping or affecting the course of *Muharam* ceremonies in other Shi'a cities through a variety of means, Najafis proudly kept this tradition as part of their local distinguished identity. Even for non-practicing Najafis, *Muharam* ceremonies were highly regarded as very sensitive and non-compromising matter. For both secular and religious orientations in Najaf, *Muharam* was often treated as a special occasion that might be used for disseminating the political message of each party without interfering in the form of the ceremony itself.

However, popular *Muharam* ceremonies may take different forms and in some instances conflicted with reformist movements like the Da'wa. Although the Da'wa supported and participated strongly in *Muharam* ceremonies as part of its political and religious expression, organizing what so called *Mawakib al-Talabah* (the students gatherings), the general attitude among the Da'wa was not to participate in most of popular practices like *Zanjil* (flagellation), *al-Tatbir* and so on.

Da'wah members' participation in these traditional ceremonies by the end of 1960 was strictly circumscribed by the party's re-organisation of the *Mawakib* according to its rules.[775] Many Najafis however came to regard the Da'wa practices as a deviation from the authentic Shi'a heritage, which were portrayed as yet another attempt by the Da'wa to undermine Shi'a identity. Rumors about al-Sadr and his students (most of them were Da'wa activists) linked them to Wahabism and al-Sadr's students were criticised for attending his *hawza* lessons. As stated earlier, the smear onslaught was part of the struggle over the *marja'iyya* and attempts made to undermine al-Sadr's position. This sensitive issue, no less important, played its role in turning popular sentiments in Najaf against the Da'wa party, which already paid the price for its independence from the *marja'iyya*. The Da'wa attitude seems to have been influenced by the Shi'a reformist trend that openly called to purify these practices from its extremist elements. This trend

[775] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.72-3; al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*.p.160.

inspired the efforts of Arab Shi'a '*ulama* like Muhsin al-Ameen in Lebanon, who went into conflict with traditional Shi'a '*ulama* over the form of *Muharam* practices. On the other hand, Da'wa probably resounded or reflected the reformist trends that prevailed among Sunni movements like Muslim Brotherhood so to reach a broader Sunni audience. It is worth noting that contrary to the Da'wa, Khomeini utilised *Muharam* as major point of conflict with the Shah's regime, supporting and encouraging popular religious beliefs and practices as part of his political platform.[776]

Thus, local motives rather than economic causes might explain the eruption of the Najaf's uprising in 1977.[777] Demographic composition of the population and local traditions prevailing in Najaf are among the main reasons for the uprising. Further to the fact that Najaf was a small community united by strong social bonds, *Muharam* commemorations in Najaf were deeply associated with the long-established professional system in the city. This system not only kept the tradition vivid and strong among the faithful but also promoted a sense of local competition between Najafi quarters. Taking part in *Muharam* ceremonies must be regarded as a stimulating and inspiring process that highlights personal and social values infused with religious ideals. As such, *Muharam* festivals seem to have been functioned and still function effectively as an opportunity to reveal one's virtues and grievances and the best moment to memorialize the Hussaini paragon without overlooking Bedouin heritage of the Najafi community.[778] The gradual but severe policies intended to ban the *Muharam* ceremonies by the Ba'th government necessarily implied an attack against its deeply-held religious customs and the social bonds that resulted among Najafis. Passionate anti-governments feelings were inevitable in this context. In sum, *Muharam* became a barometer of measuring the feelings of people towards the Ba'th government.

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[776] Concerning the different attitudes of Shi'a and Sunni movements towards popular religious practices, see Munson, H JR, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East*, ibid, pp.35-6.
[777] See about this point, Jabar, F, *the Shi'ite Movement*, ibid.p.209; Willy, J, ibid.pp.50-1.
[778] For more details about *Muharam* rituals and its importance, see Nakash, Y, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, ibid,Ch,5.pp.141-62.

The Najaf's uprising of *Safar* 1977 was much more serious than the previous small and limited disturbances that took place in 1969, 1974 and 1976. Motivated by religious feelings coupled with tribal-like Najafi traditional rivalry, the *Safar* uprising erupted first on the streets of Najaf itself as a defiant movement against the government procedures. Young Najafis announced their intention to march to Karbala on an agreed upon day; that is 15 *Safar*/ 4 February. They showed determination to march to Karbala through propaganda war. One week before the march, fliers were distributed to Najafis informing them that:

'To the people of Najaf, get ready to visit Imam Hussain marching on feet to Karbala.[779]

The message was spread by word of mouth from and by hand written flyers. This defiant action sent a warning message to the police and Ba'thists in the city. Alarmed by this defiance aimed at the policies of the Ba'th regime, the chief of the security forces in Najaf convened a meeting with the main heads of *Mawakibs* (organisers of the Hussaini gatherings), where he insultingly threatened them that they would be held responsible for any ensuing disorder in the city. More security forces sent from other parts of Iraq and redeployed in Najaf.

On Friday, 15 *Safar* 1397/ 4 February 1977, the gathering reached momentum as the young people started to come from the four quarters of Najaf; al-Mishraq, al-Buraq, al-'Amarah and al-Huwaish. The names of chief organisers of the protest (executed by the regime shortly after the uprising) reveal a considerable level of participation from the four quarters.[780] This was a vital moment as the populace agreed to take joint action. The rally, which was estimated to have had a turnout between twenty thousand to thirty thousand people, began the demonstration first towards Imam 'Ali's grave, carrying a huge green flag as a sign of loyalty to *Al al-Bayt*. As the march started, more people joined and the march became extremely vocal. Protestors began chanting slogans

[779] Al-Mosawi, R, *Intafadhat Sufar al-Islamayya*.n.p., 1402 AH.p.49.
[780] See the full list of names, Jabar, F, ibid, p.211. See for good details, al-Mosawi, R, ibid, pp.77-100.

against the Baghdad regime and its anti-Shi'a policies turning the demonstration into a collective act of political dissent. Demonstrators repeated shouting against al-Bakir, Saddam Hussain and the Ba'th party. Anti-Ba'th slogans were put together with inspiring Hussaini expressions and circulated among the intrepid protestors. Al-Bakr's and Saddam Hussain's portraits destroyed by angry demonstrators, who vandalised irreparably the vehicle of Hassan al-'Amiri, a Shi'a member in the RCC, who was on a visit to Najaf. Complete disorder had descended in the city as the marchers outnumbered the police and security forces combined. The demonstration lasted for three hours, where people expressed their religious sentiments and deep hatred for the incumbent regime.

Demonstrators marched again on the second day towards Karbala and clashed with the police and security forces. During the next two days, the marchers who continued their way to Karbala came under attacks by fighting jets and helicopters. Tanks and armored vehicles were deployed to halt the marchers from making their way to Karbala. Few people killed and over 2,000 arrested. Detainees were brought before a special military court, which was set up specifically for this purpose. Apparently, Saddam Hussain himself was pressing for tough sentences against the detainees, the fact that forced two members of the court to step down in the face of government pressures. Eight people were executed and many others sentenced for life.[781]

The Ba'th regime accused the Syrian government of instigating the *Safar* uprisings.[782] The accusations however seem unfounded as the uprising was spontaneous and in large part motivated by religiously devoted and energetic people. The organisers were ordinary people who felt humiliated by the Ba'th anti-Shi'a policies and escalating repression. The *Safar* uprising of 1977 resembles the Najaf's uprising in 1916's and

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[781] For a full account of the uprising, see al-Mousawi, R, ibid.pp.56-70. See also, Khaduri M, *Socialist Iraq*, ibid, 67-9; Tripp, C, ibid, p.208; Jabar, F, ibid.pp.208-13.

[782] Bengio, O, Shi'is and Politics in Ba'thi Iraq, *MES*, vol, 21, No.1, January-1985, (1-14).p.4; Khaduri, M, ibid, p.68; Shubar, H, *Hizb al-Da'wa*, vol, 2.pp.150-1.

1918, where ordinary Najafis took the lead position while the ‘*ulama* soon followed. In both cases, the street decided the timing and the scope of action. The Ba’th regime blamed al-Sadr for being the actual instigator behind this uprising. In fact, al-Sadr seems to have been played both instigating and mediating roles. Indeed, the demonstrators accepted al-Sadr as the most credible *Mujtahid* or *faqih* as they were looking for guidance and mediator to achieve a compromise with the government. Both al-Sadr and al-Khoei received calls from Baghdad to calm the situation. Al-Khoei and al-Sadr, therefore, urged marchers to avoid political escalation while at the same time attempting to soften the expected reaction of the Iraqi government.[783]

In fact, the Najaf uprising of 1977 was a turning point in al-Sadr’s course of life. It was this uprising rather than the Iranian Revolution that stirred once again al-Sadr to abandon his non-violent approach into that of explicit and principled resistance. The Najaf uprising, for al-Sadr, was a pivotal point that necessitated a rethinking of his peaceful apolitical strategy. Thereafter, al-Sadr took the decision to directly confront the Ba’th regime.

Ironically, the most turbulent test confronted the Ba’th came from the less organized and usually apolitical front; the grass-roots. However, lacking leadership, organisation and coherence made the *Safar* uprising a spontaneous popular upheaval with no clear goal. Neither *marja’iyya* nor Da’wa had any role in agitating this uprising.[784] The failure of the uprising revealed, among other things, the limited roles played by both the Najaf ‘*ulama* and Shi’a activists within the Iraqi Shi’a community. Events in Iran in the year to come would reinforce this paradox.

Al-Sadr and the Ba’th regime: the second phase 1977-1980

Between 1977 and until his execution in April 1980, al-Sadr emerged as a distinguished

[783] See for example, al-‘Amili, vol, 3, pp.326-8; al-Moman, ‘A, ibid, p.134; al-Numani, ibid, vol, 2, p.79.

[784] About the Da’wa role, see Jabar, F, ibid, p.209. For moderate view, see Willy, J, ibid, pp.51-2. For different view, see al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid, p.224.

Marja'i, second in rank after his master al-Khoei. Al-Sadr's lessons became a cause of attraction for scholars and students and his *wiklae* (agents) covered most cities in Iraq. However, al-Sadr *marja'iyya* seems to have been recognised specifically among Iraqis including the intelligentsia, Shi'a activists, university students and middle class. This was mainly thanks to al-Sadr's persuasive and lucid writings as well as his personal non-classical and engaging approach. Being the only Iraqi among a dozen of many Persian '*ulama* may be considered as another factor that publicised al-Sadr's reputation as an authoritative *marja'i*. For both ordinary Iraqis and the Iraqi government, al-Sadr was recognised as a high-ranking authority that was sought for his knowledge, status and influence. This explains the active role played by al-Sadr during the *Safar* uprising in 1977.

For the Iraqi government, however, the issue was different. In this regard, the Ba'th regime sought al-Sadr's writings to counter and confront the influence of its Communist rivals. As political tensions with the ICP were still rife prior to the final break-up of the National Front, the Ba'th government published al-Sadr's *Iqtisaduna* in 1978.[785] With the Communist trend still recognised as a potent threat for the Ba'th ideology, and by implication the Ba'th regime, al-Sadr's writings were seen as an effective tool to confine the appeal of the ICP to remote segments of Iraqi society e.g. secularists in the Shi'a areas. Partly because of the Ba'th's limited intellectual cadres, and mainly due to the appeal of al-Sadr's writings among Shi'a community, the Ba'th sensed that publishing al-Sadr's work might be a useful counter-discourse to defend its political, social and even religious point of view. The Ba'th's pragmatic approach had twofold effects: positive in terms of extending the Ba'th public support within the Shi'a areas particularly after the damaging consequences from suppressing the Najaf's uprising on the Ba'th itself; and negative upon their Communist rivals (most came from Shi'a

[785] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp, 484-5; al-Amili, vol, 3.pp.412-4. See also Al-Rufa'iai. 'A, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, ibid, pp.161-3

sectors), who were always depicted as atheists and disbelievers.

In this short period, al-Sadr's intellectual postures on political conduct were radicalized. Three phases can be discerned in al-Sadr's journey towards a stance of resistance. While the young al-Sadr manifested a committed interest in political activities between 1959 and 1962, he resorted to a quietist trend thereafter until 1977. From 1977 onwards, al-Sadr abandoned his peaceful apolitical tactic, adopting an entirely new revolutionary radical approach in Iraqi politics. Thus, the impetus behind this change were located not only in al-Sadr's intellectual and personal outlook but also mainly in the internal Iraqi and regional political developments that determined the scope of al-Sadr's options and subsequent decisions.

It is significant here to stress this transformation in al-Sadr's life. This transformation in effect reveals not only the importance of the intellectual factor but also the role of political developments on the ground. Applying narrow classification to explain the diverging political roles of '*ulama* is misleading and inadequate. According to the dominant scholarly view, Shi'i '*ulama* are classified into two or three camps: the quietist group consists of '*ulama* who treat politics as a worldly domain unworthy of their interest e.g. Murtada al-'Ansari and Kadhim al-Yazdi; the radical camp advocates the right to defend people's public interests e.g. Muhammad Hassan al-Shirazi (the Tobacco Question), Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi (the Iraqi Revolution of 1920); and probably a third group whose political role is circumscribed e.g. Burujirdi, Shari'atmadari.[786]

From the forgoing examination of al-Sadr, no such sharp distinction exists which divides Shi'i '*ulama* into two or three groups. As briefly stated above, both theoretical foundations and historical precedents might be invoked to support both quietist and radical groups. This fact enables '*ulama* to justify their flexible movements from far

[786] See for example, Momen, M, *An Introduction to Shi'ism*, ibid, p.195.

right to the far left and vice versa. Essentially, Shi'a '*ulama* held the view that any political authority has no legitimacy in the absence of the Hidden Imam regardless of the holder of power. This traditional attitude however did not prevent Shi'a '*ulama* from justifying their standing vis-à-vis political authority whether recognising or rejecting *de facto* power. Calder correctly argued that:

'The principle of *de jure* illegitimacy did not prevent the emergence of a spectrum of de facto approaches to political power. The potential opposition implicit in the juristic theory of *niyaba 'amam* was rarely stressed but some kind of *modus vivendi* was advocated, varying from positive support for the relatively just and tolerant (but still 'illegitimate', *ja'ir/zalim*) ruler to dissociation and dissimulation (*taqiyya*) under the obviously unjust or intolerant ruler'.[787]

Consequently,

'This variable approach is made explicit in the discussion of the condition under which it is *wajib*, *mustahabb*, *makruh* or *ja'iz* to work with the illegitimate ruler. Further, it was precisely by this ability to register a greater or lesser degree of support to actual rulers that the *fuqaha'* were able to exercise real influence on governmental policies'.[788]

Because of this, Shi'i '*ulama* were able to move from quietist wing to the radical camp and defended accordingly their position. This is true with regard to Kadhim al-Yazdi, who fought along with Muhammad Sa'id al-Haboobi against the British forces in 1916 and after then turned quietist in 1918. This applies also to both al-Na'ini and al-Isfahani who both became quietists after their fierce opposition to the British mandate and the Iraqi government.[789]

Internal political conditions prevailing in Iraq from 1977 until the outbreak of country-wide demonstrations in neighbouring Iran and the eventual ousting of the Shah in February 1979 affected al-Sadr's transformation. However, it is clear that al-Sadr's decision to renounce his peaceful stance was primarily determined by the *Safar* popular

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[787] Calder, N, 'Accommodation and Revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence: Khumayni and Classical Tradition', p.5 (3-20), *MES*, vol, 18, No, 1, January-1982.

[788] Ibid, p.6.

[789] See chapter III.

uprising of 1977. Al-Sadr, who was imprisoned for his suspected role in the uprising of 1977, observed how the Ba'th's policies were cementing its control of Iraq. Ba'th secularism has been intertwined with a strong Sunni tide in Iraq. Participation of the Shi'a community in the Iraqi state not only dropped but Shi'a identity became under threat as a result of westernisation. Thus al-Sadr's reaction was twofold: reviving Shi'a religious discourse and political activism among the Shi'a community. With regard to Shi'a discourse, al-Sadr, who subjected to intense security observation during this period, devoted again his attention to Shi'a religious topics, writing extensively on Shi'a theology, law and so on.[790] The outbreak of the Iranian Revolution in 1978 provided al-Sadr with the right moment to set in motion his political activism.

Khomeini out of Najaf: the road to the revolution

In October 1978, Khomeini was expelled from Najaf at the request of the Shah regime. Nonetheless, this step did not bring an end for Khomeini activities. From his newly acquired base in Paris as a result of exile, Khomeini was better able to organise political activities and directly engage with international media agencies. His statements and orders reached quickly to Iran and its effect heard readily in the world. However, the Islamic Revolution was not a one-day process, neither was it the product of a single man; rather the culmination of more than twenty years of struggle, led by a group of intellectuals and *'ulama*. Iranian opposition groups, ranging from the far left to the far right, had participated in the preparation for the revolution. Men like Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-69), 'Ali Shari'ati (1933-77), Mahdi Bazirgan (1905-95), Mahmood al-Talaqani (1911-1979), Muhammad 'Ali Muntadari (1922-2009) and Murtadha Mutahari (1920-80), all contributed to the making of the Islamic Revolution. Iranian opposition groups moved gradually and tactically from peaceful protest to nationwide strikes to violent attacks, which led in the whole to exhausting and weakening the Shah's regime.

[790] Malat, C, Religious militancy in contemporary Iraq: Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr and the Sunni-Shia paradigm, ibid, pp.723-6.

Eventually, this orchestrated movement brought the Shah's regime down in February 1979, leading Khomeini to declare Iran as an Islamic Republic.[791]

Rapidly unfolding events in Iran that witnessed a revolution ousting the Shah provided al-Sadr with an inspiring example. At the same time, it is appropriate here to point out that Khomeini's influence on al-Sadr was negligible during the former's stay in Najaf. In fact, al-Sadr was a close assistant to both al-Hakim and his successor al-Khoei. Furthermore, Khomeini's circle accused al-Sadr of being the main driving force that favoured al-Khoei for *marja'iyya* at the expense of Khomeini after the death of al-Hakim.[792] Indeed, some of al-Sadr students attended the lessons of Khomeini. This was true specifically for Persian–speaking students like Mahmood al-Hashimi and Muhammad Mahdi al-'Asifi, who translated Khomeini's *the Islamic Government* into Arabic. Yet the main reason behind the interest in Khomeini lessons patently was Khomeini's new political views rather than personal attachment.[793] This explains the lukewarm attention paid by Khomeini's close assistants to al-Sadr cry after the success of the Iranian Revolution, probably distrusting al-Sadr intentions.[794]

Notwithstanding, al-Sadr threw his scholarly and political weight behind the Iranian Revolution and for Khomeini. Al-Sadr's attitude in effect indicated his ideological beliefs rather than his personal association with Khomeini. Al-Sadr congratulated al-Khomeini for establishing an Islamic state and expressed his admiration of 'this great victory for Islam'.[795] He also wrote letters and statements that called upon Muslims to defend the new Islamic state. Responding to a question regarding the establishment of

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[791] See for example, Milani, Mohsen M, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution, from Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, Westview Press, Boulder-Colorado-1994, pp.110-33. Milani distinguishes eight phases in the course of the Iranian Revolution. See more details about the making of the Iranian Revolution, Martin, V, *Creating An Islamic State*, ibid, pp.147-56.

[792] Al-Amili, ibid, vol.2.p.265 & pp.364-6; al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, p. 447

[793] Earlier in 1965, Muhammad Mahdi al-'Asifi translated and published in Najaf al-Tabatabae's book *Nadharayat al-Sayasa wa-l Hukum fi al-Islam*, Al-Nu'man, Najaf. In this book al-Tabatabae defends the right of *al-Faqih* to exercise political role as a leader though it was short of Khomeini's *Walayat al-Faqeeh*, pp, 68-70.

[794] Al-Amili, ibid,vol, 4.pp.104-10; al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, ibid, p.515 & p.525.

[795] Al-Amili, ibid, vol, 4, pp, 23-4; al-Numani, ibid.vol.2.pp.132-3.

the Islamic state, al-Sadr also proposed the constitutional foundations for its system. In this pamphlet, al-Sadr undoubtedly reveals his support for Khomeini's concept of *Wilayat al-Faqeeh*.[796] However, al-Sadr's ideas in this pamphlet present the ideal panacea for the Iranian scenario and should not be accounted as his general theory. Al-Sadr, who had been acquainted with Khomeini's writings, recommended the Islamic system, as articulated by Khomeini himself. As a matter of fact, al-Sadr's writings provide both theoretical and practical solutions appropriate for given contexts. Another good example is al-Sadr's *al-Bank al-Laraboui fi al-Islam* (The non-usurious bank in Islam). In this work, al-Sadr drafted a theoretical plan that suited Islamic societies living under non-Islamic systems. Specificity of applying the values of Islam does not contradict al-Sadr's beliefs in Islamic system as a universal framework for all Muslims. This is to say that emphasizing one aspect of al-Sadr's writings without due attention to the context and timing might lead to misleading conclusions.

The Ba'th and the Iranian Revolution

Certainly, the turmoil in Iran alarmed the Ba'th regime in Iraq. However, there was no common agreement among the Ba'th's leaders over the best strategy to deal with the prospect of emerging the first Islamic Shi'a state. At the beginning, both official and unofficial statements expressed support for the Iranian Revolution that ousted the Shah, who was condemned for his compliance with the Western powers and Israel in particular. This early attitude was summarised in an article published in an Iraqi magazine close to the Baghdad government in February 1979. The article observed the Israel's support for the Shah and the concerns over the prospect, direction and the policies of the Iranian Revolution and its potential impact on Israel and the western powers. The downfall of the Shah, accordingly, would strengthen the radical powers in

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[796] Al-Amili, ibid, vol, 4, pp, 22-3 & p.39; *Al-Sadr, M.B, Lamha Tamhidayya 'An Mashroo Distoor al-Jumhurayya al-Islamayya fi Iran*. (Within *al-Islam Yaqood al-Hayat*), Dar al-Ta'ruf, Beirut, 1990, pp.18-23. See in particular p.20. Al-Sadr clearly states that the *Marja'i* is the deputy of Imam.

the region (mainly Iraq) undermining the position of conservative powers allied with the West and had moderate view towards Israel.[797]

More significant was the view expressed by Michel ‘Aflaq, the founder of the Ba’th and Mineef al-Razaz, the influential ideologue of the party. ‘Aflaq stated in April 1979, that:

‘We admire our association with the Islamic peoples, where Islam spread with a sense of Arab ethos… we receive the Iranian Revolution with deep happiness and a lot of backing, believing that where Islam exists Arabism would be exist there. It is not surprising that the Iranian Revolution demonstrates this renowned and decisive standing towards the Palestine question, founding the radical ground that is based on a revolutionary Islamic concept, to liberate *Bayt Al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem) from Zionism’.[798]

Minif al-Razaz, the then Assistant General Secretary of the Ba’th, went further to applaud the radical objectives of the Iranian Revolution led by a religious man. Al-Razaz praised the Revolution for its potential capabilities, the determination manifested by the Iranian People and the consistent leadership embodied in Ayatollah Khomeini.[799] However, Saddam Hussain who emerged as the key man behind the regime since the beginning of the 1970s had different view. Unlike others, Saddam expressed his reservations about the new regime in Iran, stating that ‘the Iranian policies towards Palestine and the Arabs’ would be tested against their aggressive attitude with the Arabs’. Saddam even put forward his condition that the Iranians should withdraw from the disputed Gulf Islands and refrain from interfering within Bahrain’s internal affairs.[800] It is indicative that while both ‘Aflaq and al-Razaz spoke of the Iranians, Hussain often intentionally used the old Arabic term *al-Furs*. This term in effect brings to mind the enmity between Arabs and Iranians as it was associated with historical

[797] ‘Aba’ad al-Mawqif al-Sehaioni min al-Tathwerat al-Jaraya fi Iran’, *Afaq ‘Arabayya*, No,6, February, 1979, pp.6-9.
[798] *Al-Thawrah al-‘Arabayya*. (The official organ of the Ba’th Party in Iraq), No, 4, April, 1979, pp.15-6.
[799] Ibid, pp.58-61.
[800] Hussain, S, *al-Iraq wa-l-Sayasah al-Dawlayya*, Dar al-Hurayya-Baghdad-1981, p.252.

events such as the battles between Arabs and *al-Furs*, *Shu'ubiyya* and so on.[801]

Al-Sadr and Saddam: the final encounter

Saddam Hussain, who became new president of Iraq after July 1979, ushered in a new period of policies. Firstly, Saddam launched a purge campaign targeting suspected elements on the grounds of plotting for Syria in late July, which eliminated any resistance to him within both the Ba'th and the government.[802] By doing so, Saddam Hussain also proceeded to engineer a break with his predecessor's foreign policies, notably towards Syria, virtually introducing a sudden rupture to the Iraqi-Syrian national agreement that was signed by both al-Bakir and Hafid al-Asad in 1978. Thus, Saddam Hussain's hostile attitude towards Iran might be explained in the light of this radical shift decided by Saddam himself.

On the other hand, Saddam did not hesitate to take quick steps to check al-Sadr movement. Actually, al-Sadr's clear support to Khomeini signalled a warning sign to the Ba'th regime in Baghdad, which was already aware of al-Sadr's position and his considerable influence among the Shi'a community. It was not surprising that Saddam stepped up his pressure on al-Sadr to comply with Baghdad formal orders amid increasing Shi'a activities in Iraq.[803]

As al-Sadr found himself once again under spotlight, he may have come now to the conclusion that the regime was preparing the ground for preemptive offensive to crush any potential threat in Najaf. Al-Sadr's new shift was greatly influenced by the Iranian events but certainly voiced the demands of the Shi'a majority in Iraq. Indeed, years of oppression and exclusion heightened the feelings of the Shi'a community and compelled al-Sadr to take a more explicitly political role in the hope of ending the Shi'a plight. Ba'th radical secular policies alienated the role of religious community and

[801] See chapter 3, 4 and 5 about *Shu'ubiyya*.
[802] Tripp, C, ibid, pp.213-8; Marr, P, ibid.pp.178-80; Sluglett & Sluglett, ibid, pp.206-13.
[803] Al-Numani, ibid, vol, 2, pp.70-1; al-Amili, ibid, vol, 4, pp.146-74.

particularly marginalised Najaf's clerics. In this light, al-Sadr seemingly seized this moment as the best chance to defend the rights of the Iraqi Shi'a.

Al-Sadr first formed a small committee commissioned with the responsibility of administering and steering his directions on the ground. This was realised between February and March 1979, when al-Sadr ordered Mahmood al-Hashimi, his chief assistant to call upon his close students. The committee included in addition to al-Hashimi, a number of clerics who either had close link with the Da'wa party or were part of al-Sadr's close network.[804] Formation of this committee was a tangible step on the road to carry out an Islamic Revolution in Iraq. The committee, however, did not fulfill its goals mainly due to the security measures taken by Baghdad government in Shi'a areas throughout Iraq.

The upheaval in Iran precipitated the pace of events in Iraq. Under the influence of the Iranian revolutionary euphoria, Shi'a activists in Iraq took to the streets in Najaf, Basrah and other Shi'a regions, organising demonstrations and gatherings to celebrate the victory of the Islamic Revolution and to publicly show their support for al-Sadr. The Da'wa party took this moment to display their well-organised and intact network through coordinating and organising the *Baya'a* (pledge) assemblies. Shi'a activists from across Iraq mobilised in public rallies to show their commitment for al-Sadr.[805]

Some Shi'a activists may have reached the conclusion that the Iranian scenario could only be imitated in Iraq through violent actions. This action would eventually lead to the toppling of the Ba'th regime. Violent attacks, therefore, were carried out by committed Shi'a activists especially in Baghdad. In retaliation, the Ba'th government intensified its security policy at both internal and external fronts. Members of the Da'wa arrested and sent to prisons, where they were tortured to death; thousands of Iraqis were displaced from their homes fleeing to Iran under the guise of their Iranian origin; and security

[804] Al-Khirsan, S, *Al-Sadr*, pp.497-8.
[805] Al-Moman, 'A, ibid, pp.165-71; al-Khirsan, S, *Hizb*, ibid, pp.275-80.

measures severely curtailed life of the Shi'a community in general.

The Ba'th government also responded to the 'radical tone' expressed by the new regime in Iran. For instance, some of Khomeini's close circle announced that Iraq and other Gulf states are parts of Iran. The Ba'th government accused the new Iranian regime of *Tasdeer al-Thawra* (exporting the Revolution), condemning the new racist Persian attitude showed towards the Arab.[806]

While the new Islamic regime in Tehran initially appeared uncertain towards the escalating events in Iraq, it now declared a clear call to challenge the Iraqi regime. Admittedly, Khomeini's letters to al-Sadr stirred the Iraqi regime into action through a harsh and rapid launching of mass arrests while at the same time seeking to win over al-Sadr to its side. The tactic used against al-Sadr was similar to the one used against Sayyed al-Hakim in 1969 during his last stay in Baghdad. Whereas security forces rounded up Shi'a activists across Iraq, the government's representatives, envoys and even Shi'a religious clerics attempted to negotiate a personal reconciliation with al-Sadr.[807] Al-Sadr was offered no option: either to abjure his calls for revolution and show his public support for the Ba'th regime or to face imminent death. Al-Sadr however seems to have decided his own fate.

Probably, anticipating that this was his last chapter, al-Sadr announced his famous revolutionary statements in the hope of radicalising the streets of Iraq. Under house arrest, al-Sadr recorded desperately his last three statements to the Iraqi people. In his first statement, al-Sadr sought to address the sensitive issues among Iraqi Muslims in general and the Shi'a people in particular by denouncing the restriction imposed by the Ba'th on Shi'a traditions like *Muharram* ceremonies as well as Islamic duties (Friday prayer). Al-Sadr expressed the thought of his impending martyrdom in his second

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[806] *Afaq 'Arabayya*, No, 9, May-1980, pp.2-5 & No, 10, June-1980, pp.2-52. Interestingly, the Ba'th's view expressed here in an article was specifically dedicated to attack al-Khomeini's views in his book *al-Hukoomat al-Islamayya*. In the article, Khomeini's turban is replaced with the Shah's throne.

[807] Al-Numani, ibid, vol, 2,173-5; al-Amili, ibid, vol, 4, pp.238-51.

statement; calling on Iraqi Muslims to work hard to continue *jihad* in the struggle to overthrow the Ba'th regime. In his third statement, al-Sadr however turned his attention to other Iraqis; the Sunnis and the Kurds, underlining the importance of realising that fighting the Ba'th regime was not a combat between Shi'a and Sunnis.[808]

Al-Sadr's statements however did not receive any response. At the same time, attempts were made to convince al-Sadr to escape from Iraq as a last resort but he declined this idea.[809] Realising the foregone conclusion, martyrdom became the sole dream of al-Sadr. Months of house arrest under harsh conditions made al-Sadr apt to embrace the Hussaini martyrdom ideal as an unquestionably great victory over the Ba'th regime. Consequently, Baghdad government executed both al-Sadr and his sister Amina al-Sadr (known as Bint al-Huda) on 8 April 1980 and buried their bodies on the following day in Najaf.

In fact, al-Sadr was in no position to copy the Iranian experience. Regardless of the different historical contexts in Iraq and Iran, al-Sadr movement lacked the requisite plans and capabilities to launch a revolution against the Ba'th regime. In contrast to Khomeini, who prepared the ground for his revolution since the mid-1960s, al-Sadr's movement was spontaneous and unplanned. Al-Sadr's message was limited only to a group of like-minded intellectuals, forming a vanguard to spread his message but this message did not reach the masses. Al-Sadr stated with regret at the beginning of his movement that his dream to teach *al-'Usus al-Mantaqaya lil-Istiqra* (the Logical Foundations of Induction), is irrelevant today and the most important thing now is how to win over populace and direct them in this struggle against the regime.[810]

This is a peculiar feature which distinguishes between al-Sadr's movement and the late

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[808] Najaf, 'A, *al-Shahid al-Shahid*, pp.126-38; Al-Numani, ibid,vol, 2, pp.153-5 & pp.166-7 & 187-90; al-Haeri, K, *Al-Shahid Al-Sadr*, ibid, pp.209-17.

[809] Al-Amili, ibid, vol, 4, pp.224-8.

[810] See al-Khirsan, S, al-Sadr, *Al-'Usus al-Mantaqaya lil-Istiqra* is regarded as al-Sadr's magnum opus. Al-Sadr himself thought that this book in particular deserves to be translated into English and he encouraged some scholars to do so.

Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. Sadiq al-Sadr's call gained a receptive audience among Iraqi ordinary people owing to its simple and direct message. The late al-Sadr distinguished between two discourses; one specifically designed for his students and the other for Iraqi ordinary people. His regular attachment to the classes of the downtrodden and the needy made him a saint-like symbol revered with great honor particularly in poor and neglected areas, where Shi'i '*ulama* lost credibility. This does in part explain the recent phenomenon in Iraqi politics, where the Muqtada al-Sadr's movement (Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's younger son) has enjoyed huge support in Shi'a slum towns unlike the governing Da'wa Party.[811]

While Khomeini rallied all Iranians behind him thanks to a mix of national and religious programme, al-Sadr's call for a revolutionary movement faltered on the deeps divisions within Iraqi society. Although al-Sadr belatedly realised the importance of specifically nationalist rhetoric, the Iranian example echoed in his call. This example however overlooked or underestimated the deep sectarian division within the Iraqi society though al-Sadr himself tried to transcend this cleavage. Crucially, this division reinforced Saddam Hussain's grip on power until the downfall of the Ba'th regime in April 2003.

Further, al-Sadr's movement received little consideration among the Iraqi Shi'a. For the majority of Iraqi Shi'is, the left, nationalist and pan-Arab tendencies had more appeal than political Islam. Al-Sadr himself confessed that the Ba'th regime had succeeded in allying many Shi'i *'ulama* in Lebanon for its side. The Ba'th undoubtedly secured solid support among the Shi'a community as the regime controlled both state power and patronage. The majority of the Shi'a community in Iraq was less attracted to the Iranian example owing to historical and political reasons. However, al-Sadr seems to have been expected too much from the Iranians. The Iranians, who were more

[811] See for example, Rauof, 'A, *Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Marjayyat al-Maydan*. Dumscus-1999; Anderson, L & Stansfield, G, *The Future of Iraq, Dictatorship, Democracy or Division,* New York-2004-pp.132-4; Nasir, V, *The Shia Revival,* ibid, pp.190-4.

concerned with their internal problems and arising difficulties, paid very little and late attention to al-Sadr's revolutionary call.

Al-Sadr's call attracted no attention within the Najaf's *hawza* itself, where the majority of '*ulama* either discredited or deserted al-Sadr for his political activities. Antagonistic attitudes showed by the majority of Najaf's '*ulama* and their indifferent stance towards al-Sadr undermined al-Sadr's position before the Ba'th regime. Concomitantly, Baghdad cut off al-Sadr from both his followers and *marja'iyya* support. Being in Najaf under these circumstances, al-Sadr's Iraqi revolution was easily suppressed. If al-Sadr fled into exile, his story and the story of Iraq certainly, would be different today.

Conclusion

The Ba'th ascendancy to power in Baghdad brought an end to politically charged Shi'a activism. The period between 1968 and 1980 witnessed three forms of political conduct by the *'ulama*. While the Ba'th maintained normal relations with al-Hakim from July 1968 up until April 1969, these relations deteriorated rapidly in June 1969, ending on a bitter note until the death of al-Hakim in the beginning of 1970. This date signalled the end of relative freedom exercised by the Shi'a *marja'iyya* and the Da'wa party alike and eclipsing Najaf's active role in the Iraqi politics. During this period, the Ba'th government launched a massive and unprecedented offensive that cast a wide net crippling Shi'a institutions, '*ulama* and businessmen, bringing the *marja'iyya* to kneel. The implications of this confrontation were to be transmitted to the next generation.

The second period, or the post-al-Hakim era, started immediately after the death of al-Hakim and continued until 1977, where both Shi'a *marja'iyya* and the Da'wa party subjugated to severe policies ushering in a new phase. Whereas *marja'iyya* resorted to concealment to defend the *hawza* body, it became more vulnerable to direct interference by Baghdad. The more *marja'iyya* retreated the more the Ba'th regime accelerated its measures to control Najaf's *hawza*. Clearly, the concealment tactic did not save the

Najafi *hawza* as '*ulama* and Shi'a activists were targeted by the Ba'th regime. Both internal factors and regional developments benefited Baghdad government's policies of repression in the face of a politically charged yet unfledged Shi'a movement.

The third episode starts with the Najaf's *Safar* uprising of 1977 as the populace reacted passionately against the Ba'th ban on *'Ashura* rituals. Although the protest was spurred by enthusiastic religious feelings, it marked a genuine challenge to Baghdad authority. This short and spontaneous event sent a shockwaves across Iraq to both Baghdad politicians and the Najaf *'ulama*. This rebellion caused al-Sadr to discontinue his peaceful approach for the resumption his engagement within Iraqi political affairs. Consequently, the Iranian Revolution provided al-Sadr with the right conditions to declare his Iraqi revolution against the Ba'th regime.

Al-Sadr's movement lacked all the requirements needed for making it successful save the personal determination of al-Sadr. Al-Sadr's revolution was quickly suppressed soon after he was executed, realising though his dream to become the new Hussain of the Iraqi Shi'a people. Henceforth, the Shi'a opposition in Iraq waged its war under the banner of *al-Shahid Al-Sadr* (the martyr al-Sadr).

Conclusion

Najaf: reversing Iraq's phase

The Iraqi political panorama that emerged after 2003 has been in many ways a repercussion of Iraq's old state model of the preceding century. If one considers 1921 as the year of forming the Iraqi state, then the year 2003 can be viewed as the second birth of the Iraqi state. It is clear that the second Iraqi state that was established in 2003 represents the utter opposite of the one founded in 1921.

Although these two junctures have been conditioned by almost identical historical events (occupation in particular), the sequence of the two births was completely dissimilar. The result of the British occupation was a virtual control of the Sunni minority over the Iraqi state that ended only with the American occupation of 2003. The American invasion, by contrast, led to an obvious Shi'a control, the fact that largely explains the ensuing events whether in Iraq or across the Middle East. At any rate, these two contradictory pictures may signify the turbulent course of Iraqi history at the turn of the twentieth century and in the opening of the twenty-first century.

Najaf's stance had been present at both moments and decisive in pining down the final shape of the new Iraqi system post-2003. It was Najaf, not Baghdad nor Washington that shaped the new Iraq. The ebb and flow of Najaf's role perfectly summarizes the history of the modern Iraqi state since its inception.

Najaf: the heart of Shi'ism

For more than a century, Najaf epitomized the symbol of the Iraqi dilemma. While representing the Shi'is' plight, Najaf's story, on the other hand, reveals a constant and persistent tension that painted Iraqi politics; Najaf with its religious authority over the

Shi'a majority and Baghdad, the traditional base of making Iraqi politics. This inherited conflict between the secular (politics) and the sacred (religion) left a distinct mark upon Iraqi politics throughout the preceding decades and remained so until the end of the old Iraqi state in April 2003 and perhaps beyond.

Initially, Najaf had established itself as the Mecca of Shi'i Muslims following the discovery of Imam 'Ali's Grave during the first 'Abbasid's era. From a sacred centre, Najaf then developed gradually into an important seminary for religious learning. Since then, Najaf turned from a marginal and desolate place into a favorite destination for the Shi'a faithful. The sanctity of the Grave coupled with the sudden move of Shaikh al-Tusi from Baghdad opened the way for Najaf to emerge as the most important Shi'a learning centre in the Islamic world. This phase continued for more than four centuries though other important centres (Hilla and Karbala, for instance) contributed significantly. Najaf's religious and, most importantly, political role became more visible only with the establishment of the Safavid state in Iran in early 1500s.

Throughout the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, Najaf had enhanced its reputation not only as an indisputable religious learning centre, but above all, as a significant political arbiter between the Ottoman Sunni state and the neighboring Persian state. This religio-political role became solidified especially after both the Tobacco Concession and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. By the turn of the 20th century, Najaf, therefore, secured its position as the main broker of Iraqi Shi'i interests. This manifested itself with the leading role played by Najaf's '*ulama* in setting up the foundations for the new Iraqi state. This moment, however, signified the gradual eclipse of Najaf's status as a political broker and further, the decline of its importance as a learning centre.

Political and economic transformations in Iraq during the first decades of the twentieth century coincided with noticeable mobilization in Najaf's social classes. The Killidar,

who was once regarded as the most powerful man in Najaf, lost most of his charismatic features at the eve of the twentieth century. While the majority of leading '*ulama* came from Arab families during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their numbers dropped drastically with the advancing pace of modernization in the twentieth century.[812] This is also true with regard to both merchants and artisans. It is striking to note that most merchants and craftsmen were non-Arab in the second half of the twentieth century in contrast to the 19th century, where Arab merchants comprised the majority of this group. Although the *effendiyya* class included both Arab and non-Arab educated people, it nonetheless presented a new and fresh hope for Arab families to hold prominent responsibilities in the emergent political groups especially after losing the leading role to Persian families in both the market and *hawza*. Although *Sadah* is an exclusively closed status, it is nonetheless regarded as an open space for both Arabs and non-Arab.

Najaf and founding the Iraqi state

Many researchers have regarded the old Iraqi model as a good example of bad nation-state building. The model was created to preserve powers in the hands of a small elite, and was meant to exclude the vast majority of the population. The building process, therefore, neglected the various constituents of Iraqi society and failed to respond proportionally to the people's demands, the fact that resulted in a constant weakness of the Iraqi state itself.[813]

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[812] This conclusion might be reached through investigating the names of *'ulama*. See for example, Mahbuba. (3 vols) see, vol.1.p.380 & p.400; Hirz-ul-Din, *Marif al-Rijal*, (3 vols). See for example, vol, 1, pp.308-12, vol.2.pp18-9, p.35, 93 & pp.342-27; vol.3.6-8; al-Dujaili, J, *Musua'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, vol, 11 &12; al-Amini, M, H, *Ma'jam Rijalat al-Fikr wal- Adab fi al-Najaf Khilal alf 'Am*, n.p-1992 (3 vols) al-Khaqani, *Shura' al-Gharai*, (12 vols). See also, al-Sherees, N, *Al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, Najaf-1975, vol, 1.p.8, 24, 42, 46-8, 67, 97-8.

[813] See for instance, Sluglett, P, *Britain in Iraq, Contriving King and Country*, I.B. TAURIS, London, 2007, Appendix I, A Note on Shi'i Politics, pp.219-231; idem. *The British Legacy*, pp. 3-14 in, Eisenstadt, M & Mathewson, E (edits) *U.S.Policy in Post-Saddam Iraq, Lessons from the British Experience*; the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2003, Kelidar, A, Iraq National Integration under the British, pp. 27-37, in Eisenstadt & Mathewson, ibid.

I have maintained that the building of the Iraqi state was an arbitrary sequel of the modernization process, the process that re-shaped the whole region. Modernization in this context, however, has nothing to do with the hypothesis proposed by Khaddar, Marr and others, who referred to the social, economic and technological developments that were introduced to Iraqi society prior to the British occupation in 1917.[814] Instead, modernization here specifically signifies the nationalist ideology itself as a medium that transformed traditional Iraqi society from its pre-modern status into its current nation-state and political institutions that embody the state. Borrowing Breuilly's words, modernization 'is focused narrowly upon political institutions. The key idea involved in this modified application of the concept of westernization or modernization is that of the colonial state as a new type of political authority'.[815]

According to this paradigm, the spread of nationalism was a concurrent result of modernity. Smith points out that: 'this is the conception that nations and nationalism are intrinsic to the nature of the modern world and to the revolution of modernity'.[816] To put it simply: modernity created nationalism, and the latter in turn, 'created nations and that the activities of national elites served to promote the needs of social and political development'.[817]

Like many parts of the world, the old Iraqi model provides an ideal example, where external colonial powers instigated a new state, which in turn founded the nation.[818] Admittedly this model illustrates a stark contrast to the experience of nation-state building in developed countries, where the process came in parallel with the emergence and development of the bourgeoisie class; the nation-state in pre-colonial societies was

[814] About the impact of modernization upon Iraq, see, Haj, S, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963.Capital, Power, and Ideology*, State University of New York Press, 1997, pp.1-2; Marr, P, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Westview Press, 2004, pp.7-8.
[815] Breuilly, J, *Nationalism and the State*, 1993, pp. 218-19. See also, Smith, A, *Nationalism and Modernization*, Routledge-1998, 1st published, pp.19-21, 106-9.
[816] Smith, ibid, p.3
[817] Smith, ibid, p.19
[818] Zubaida, S, The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq, *IJMES*, p.206.

installed from above.[819] Building nation-states from above has usually been linked with external colonial powers. In this sense, changes initiated in the new states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America were brought about by an interventionist state. In other words, there was no state-like medium (central authority with state institutions and one civil law) to cause political, social and cultural changes in these pre-colonial societies. The invaders thus precipitated these changes through disrupting the traditional structural systems, replacing the old form of society along with its norms and values with a new modernized one. Undoubtedly, nation-state was an alien concept to these societies and the scale of political, social and even religious changes were unprecedented.[820] Foreign occupation, thus (non-Muslim and alien power, Britain in this context) awakened Iraqis' nationalist consciousness, to assert the claim of an independent Iraqi state. Thus, in contrast to the Ottoman tutelage, which lasted for centuries, British occupation was challenged on the grounds of Iraqi nationalist consciousness, and lead to the creation of the new state. In plain words, foreign occupation laid the seeds of its destruction and created the Iraqi nation-state within its current borders. This was also true of other parts of Ottoman territory including Egypt, Syria, and much of the North Africa.

The British administration in Iraq undoubtedly reflected their experiences with the Shi'i '*ulama* in Iran and Iraq and this affected and shaped the British construction of the Iraqi nation-state. The British arrangement, accordingly, asserted the supremacy of Iraq's Sunni minority over other communities. As such, 'while genuine contenders for

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[819] See Gellner, E, *Nations and Nationalism*, Blackwell-Oxford-UK, 1993, pp.13-14, 41-3.

[820] A good example is the long and ongoing debate among the Egyptian intellectuals regarding the French occupation of Egypt in 1798. This occupation, according to one view, led to the emerging of the first modern Arab state. For a general view, see for example, Hourani, A, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, Oxford University Press-1962, pp. 49-52, & pp.193-4. For the first view, see 'Uoadh, L, *Tarikh al-Fikr al-Masry al-Hadeeth*, Dar al-Hilal, Cairo-1969, vol, 1, pp 126-209, vol, 2, pp 55-88. For opposite view, see, Anan, L, *al-Hamlat al-Faransiyat, Tanweer am Tazweer*, Dar al-Hilal, Cairo-1992, vol, 2.

nationhood, such as the Kurds, were relegated, artificial contenders were 'created' where expedient for Britain'.[821]

Thus, the beneficiaries of modernization were not the real makers of nationhood but the ones who had close connections to the source of modernization. The Shi'is of Iraq, were the losers/or victims of westernization/modernization.[822]

From Najaf to Baghdad

No doubt, establishing the Iraqi state with its central policies, civil education with national curriculum and above all, one national army transformed the balance in favor of Baghdad's side. Baghdad, the new centre of Iraq and its unifying symbol seemed more appealing and open for all Iraqis than Najaf, the small city with its religious restrictions and traditional image. This shift did not only strengthen Baghdad's position as the sole legitimate owner of coercive power but also its capability as a sole distributor of political gains and economic privileges.[823] Inevitably, this required the transformation of Shi'a loyalty from its traditional authority (Shi'a *marja'iyya*), which is based on the 'belief in the legitimacy of what has always existed' (sanctity of tradition) to rational-legal authority rested in the hands of modern state.[824] Although religious authority remained in the hands of *mujtahids*, their political authority was seriously undermined.

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[821] Preston, Zoe, *The Crystallization of the Iraqi State. Geopolitical Function and Form*, Bern-2003, p.249. See also, Vatikiotis, P, J, *Islam and the State*, Croom Helm Ltd-1987, pp.135-42; Lukitz, L, Dating the Past: C.J, Edmonds and the Invention of Modern Iraq, pp.91-102, in (editor) Gammer, M, *Political Thought and Political History*, Frank Cass-London-2003, p.249; Bengio.O. Nation Building in Multiethnic Societies: The Case of Iraq, pp.149-69, in (editors) Bengio, O, & Ben-Dor, G, *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*, Boulder-London, 1999.

[822] According to Hsu who conducted a search study in a small town in China, the people 'who accepted inoculation were not the most educated, but those most closely in contact with, or economically dependent on, *Westerners*; (italic added) the transmission of modernism depends not on intellectual but on personal links'. Hsu, F.L.K (1952) 'Religion, Science and Human Crisis- A Study of China in Transition and its Implications for the West', in Budd, Susan, *Sociologists and Religion,* Collier-Macmillan Publishers, London, 1973, p.62.

[823] Weber, Max, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, edited with an introduction by Talcott Parsons, the Free Press of Glencoe, New York-USA, 1964, p.156.

[824] See for more details, Weber, Max, ibid, pp.130-1.

More and more, Najaf lost its traditional allies (tribal shaikhs, Sadah, and so on) who were seeking Baghdad's consent rather than Najaf's blessing. Political transformation in particular was enhanced by the fact that leading *'ulama* in Najaf (mainly the Persian *mujtahids*) had declared their total desertion of political activity. Thus, Arab *mujtahids* (Kashif al-Ghita in mind) were left as an isolated group, who were seeking to alter the irreversible political game. This clearly manifested in 1930s when Kashif al-Ghita himself came to realize the weight of Baghdad on his allies (again the tribal shaikhs in the Middle Euphrates), therefore decided to ease his political involvement within Baghdad's affairs.

Not surprising, while Najaf's position deteriorated into a mere visitation place, its *hawza* declined rapidly, bringing into question the status of the Shi'a '*ulama* within their community. Najaf's *'ulama's* political role and even credibility were brought to test during the first half of the 20th century. The secular education of modern schools challenged and tarnished the traditional religious learning in Najaf. One implication of this was the emerging of the *effendayya* group as an ambitious class yearning for economic, social and political change in Iraq. Modern ideas and trends also transformed the fabric of the Shi'a community as more people opted for ameliorating their social status and political participation.

Shi'is and political mobilization

However, this complex situation itself furnished the grounds for common Shi'is to emerge to the political surface as active participants in new secular groupings. Traditional religious institutions, *'ulama* and classic concepts appeared incapable to provide any viable substitution, thus gave way to modern political activists and ideological movements that could address questions of intellectual innovation, political change and economic development. In this regard, I have argued that while Arab Shi'i youth found fulfillment and hope in political groups, which acted as a means of

expressing their voices (to achieve political change), members of non-Arab Shi'a communities considered traditional religious studies in *hawza*. For this reason, prominent Iraqi families accustomed to send their sons to *hawza* shifted their attention to the new civil institutions (teaching, engineering, civil services, etc), leaving ample opportunities for other ethnic communities to fill the gap left by the new Arab Shi'a generation. Prominent Najafi families moved from Najaf to Baghdad in search of better positions, wealth and status in the Iraqi society. Thus, the increasing number of politicized Shi'i individuals can also give an explanation for the accelerating decline of the Shi'a religious seminaries on the one hand, and the new increasing role played by educated Shi'is on the other. Social tensions and economic changes within Najaf's community should also be considered as part and parcel of the political mobilization that often affected people's affiliations to political groups or ideologies.

The period under study, witnessed the spread of nationalist and leftist ideologies in the same way that took place in most western countries. More people (especially the educated) became disillusioned with the capability of religion to heal social, political and religious diseases. Political ideologies were thus perceived as the modern panacea as they promised to end political instability, economic disparity and social and religious discrimination in Iraqi society. In this sense, political ideologies seem to have offered a civil (if not secular) religion that could provide satisfying answers for questions usually neglected by religious creeds.

The spread of nationalist ideologies and especially the popularity of Marxist ideas among Shi'is was a direct consequence of modernism. Political ideologies operated as an alternative creed and political groupings granted a new status for the politicized youth. Political party membership functioned as a social driving force for individuals, replacing the old religious bonds. Further to political redemption, modern political ideologies were perceived as a kind of mobilizing social power, capable of lifting

people from the traditional lower class to the new middle class of "*effendi*" or educated class, where social status gained through party membership. In sum, political agitation was not due to the potential of financial incentives, but mainly due to a new aspiration to gain social mobilization and political recovery in a changing society.

I have also proposed that ideologies (Communism in particular) worked as a radical option for ordinary Shi'is. I suggested that the capability of Communism to reconcile its principles with Shi'a ideas and ideals armed the leftist movement with Shi'a themes, symbols and doctrines as part of its mechanism, giving Communist ideology a Shi'a image and color to strengthen its presence in Iraq. In simple words, Communism appeared like a secular Shi'ism devoid of its religious rituals and daily imperatives.

From a stronghold of the Iraqi Shi'a community, Najaf was refashioned during the 1940s and 1950s as a bastion of political groups, represented mainly by the ICP and the Istiqlal Arab nationalist movement.

In their quest for power throughout the 1950s, secular trends engaged, provided Shi'a *'ulama* with a new space for political participation. Najafi '*ulama* found themselves trapped in the political fighting between two secular groups; the ICP and nationalist movement. This role intensified and became a new feature with the coming of the first Iraqi Republic in 1958.

Shi'a *'ulama* and regional politics

The July 1958 Revolution was a moment of political convulsion as the ICP emerged as a mass party in the Iraqi arena. Domestic political contests between Qasim backed by the ICP on one side, and the nationalist groups, mainly the Ba'th, on the other, opened the way for Shi'i '*ulama* in Najaf to emerge as a major potential ally. External players (Egypt and Iran) had their part in the political conflict and maneuvered to exploit their relationship with the Shi'a *marja'iyya* to influence the Iraqi political game. The political confrontation that broke out between the Ba'th, led at the time by the Shi'a-dominated

leadership and the ICP, ended in February 1963 to the advantage of the nationalists. Shi'i *'ulama*, notably al-Hakim were part of wider political network that was entangled in this regional political strife.

Obviously, many factors helped make al-Hakim's *marja'iyya* one of strongest players in the history of Shi'ism. Al-Hakim exerted his religious and political weight among the Shi'a community through making good use of religious activities, supporting pseudo-political organizations, such as *Jama'at al-'Ulama* in Najaf as well as his political ties with regional powers (Iran and Egypt particularly). Al-Hakim also encouraged establishing the Da'wa Party as a tool to engage in the political struggle in Iraq. However, Najaf's opposition to Qasim seems to have served only the nationalist trend rather than realizing the political goals of the Iraqi Shi'a majority.

As a result of confrontation with the 'Arif regime, the sectarian tendency heightened among Shi'i '*ulama* and their political wing the Da'wa. Al-Hakim, who had shown sympathy for Arab nationalist causes, turned his attention to Iraqi affairs with priority for Shi'a grievances. Shi'a grievances widely unfolded as 'Abdul Salam's regime was controlled by a small Sunni group, which pursued a centralized authority with no intention to share power with other communities. The bitter sectarian divide was sensed within the Shi'a community, hence al-Hakim thought of a military option in the hope of elevating the Shi'a share of influence in Iraqi politics. Al-Hakim, who asserted Shi'a demands during this period, remained undetermined regarding his final goals.

The Shi'a *marja'iyya*, its well-built religious networks and above all the Shi'a political movement confronted a fatal challenge with the ascendance of the Ba'th regime in 1968. The Ba'th utilized Iraq's accumulated financial resources and a new regional position, so as to curb its internal opponents, including Najaf's Shi'a *marja'iyya*, the Kurds as well as the ICP. The Shi'a *marja'iyya* in Najaf was put in check and new

measures were taken to reduce the sway of the Shi'a movement. These policies successfully worked for Baghdad's side but did not eliminate the Shi'a anger.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 thus brought the Shi'a anger to the fore once again, and provided the Iraqi Shi'a movement and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in particular with an inspiring moment through which their awaited goals could be realized. However, the internal situation, regional complexities and most importantly, international developments all stood against the Iraqi Spring, bringing Iraqi Shi'a activism virtually to its demise in early 1980. Unlike the Shah's regime in Iran, the Ba'th stood on sold ground to withstand any disturbances, and Saddam was in no way to repeat the Shah's mistakes. A campaign of terror and oppressive policies successfully worked in the regime's interest. The Iraq-Iran War also served the regime as it weakened any opposition inside Iraq.

A wrecked *hawza* in a devastated state: Najaf in post-1980 Iraq

This study ended with the outbreak of the war between Iraq and Iran in 1980. Between 1980 and 2003, Iraq went though three devastating wars (the long Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88), the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the subsequent First Gulf War in 1991 and the Second Gulf War in 2003 that eventually led to the overthrow of the Iraqi regime.

The Iraq-Iran War not only exhausted the once strong Iraqi economy, but also brought about catastrophic effects on Iraqi society. Hundereds of thousands lost their lives, many other thousands either wounded or displaced from their homeland for political reasons. This war however enhanced Baghdad's regime and weakened any potential opposition as it had shifted attention from domestic issues to the priority of defending 'Iraq'. According to Jabar, the war 'was sought as a means to further construct and enhance

etatist nationalism, and this attempt, although challenged, was relatively successful during much of the Iran-Iraq War'.[825]

Iraq was driven from pillar to post when Saddam decided to invade Kuwait in August 1990. The First Gulf War that followed intensified the wounds of Iraq resulting in more heavy losses and long destructive sanctions imposed for more than a decade. Meanwhile, unexpected uprising swept the middle, south, as well as the northern regions of Iraq during March 1991. Again, Jabar attributes the outbreak of the uprising to the clash that occurred after 1990-91 between the nationalism propagated and sponsored by the regime and popular patriotism of Iraqi people.[826] The failure of the uprising generated another tragedy as people were interned *en masse*, executed and buried in mass graves.

The aftermath of the First Gulf War and the subsequent repression of the uprising should be truly considered as the beginning of the end for the Ba'th regime. Economic sanctions coincided with severe security measures, which made the lives of ordinary Shi'is unbearable, thus pushing them away from the regime. Unsurprisingly, one of the most profound outcomes of *al-Intifadha al-Shabanayya* (the Shaban Uprising), as they favor to call it in the Shi'a regions has been the resurgence of the Shi'a identity in the face of Saddam, who in turn identified more strongly with his Sunni origin. Shi'a frustration intensified as a result of the complicity of regional powers particularly Saudi Arabia and Turkey in deterring a Shi'a government. This communal Shi'a identity best found its expression in the middle 1990s when Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr successfully constructed wide scale popular Shi'a religious networks. Al-Sadr skillfully utilized the prevailing anger among his Shi'a followers after the First Gulf War and the difficulties

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[825] Jabar, Faleh A, The War Generation in Iraq: A Case of Failed Etatist Nationalism, p.121, in (pp,121-40), (edit) Potter, Lawrence G. & Sick, Gary, G, *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Hampshire, 1st published, 2004.

[826] Jabar, Faleh, A, ibid, p.129; and also see his Why the Intifada Failed, pp.97-117, in, (edit) Hazelton, Fran, *Iraq since the Gulf War, Prospects for Democracy*, Zed Books Ltd, London & New Jersey,1994.

resulting from the economic embargo to challenge the authority of the Ba'th in Baghdad. This culminated in the assassination of al-Sadr in 1999 when disturbances erupted particularly in al-Thorah district (named al-Sadr city after al-Sadr soon after April 2003) in Baghdad. Ordinary people were the real makers of the uprisings of 1991 and of 1999 with a very limited guiding role form the Shi'i *'ulama* in Najaf. This reflects among other things, the limited role played by Najaf, as the central authority in Baghdad brought the city and its seminaries under its direct control.

No doubt, years of wars and sanctions bolstered the position of Baghdad's authority vis-à-vis the Shi'a institutions. While the Shi'a *marja'iyya* in Najaf became increasingly subject to interference even during al-Khoei's life, the Da'wa and other Shi'a activists fled Iraq, to live in exile (mainly Iran and later some western countries).

At this crossroad, exile to Iran affected the ideology of the Shi'a Islamic movement, which was now to follow the Iranian example merely but not exclusively, for pragmatic reasons. During these years, the history of the Shi'a movement was written under the influence of the Iranian experience, distorting to a great extent the course of past events. However, divisions over new religio-political lines, notably the position towards *Wilayat all-Faqih* in Iran, the relationship between religion and politics and the need to reconstruct a new reformed discourse within the Islamic movement marred Shi'a activists. These intellectual disputes resulted in the formation of small splintering groups with no real effect inside Iraq. Indeed, neither Shi'i *'ulama* nor Shi'a movements posed any real threat for Baghdad's central authority, which rested its authority on mere heavy-handed policies. In fact, the main question for Iraqis was not *Wilayat al-Faqih* or the need for a more reformed Islam, as the Shi'a majority became totally isolated from Baghdad's central powers, though prey of its oppressive policies.

At the eve of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the picture in Iraq, therefore seemed to have been very different on the ground from the one that has often been

studied and analyzed in the western academia. Not surprising then, that exiled movements like the once strong ICP, the Da'wa and SCIRI appeared disconnected from Shi'a Iraqi masses, who were now mainly influenced by either the decrees of the charismatic Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani or the orders of the young radical Muqtada al-Sadr.[827]

This complicated picture imposed itself on the directions and the orientations of the post-2003 political game. As such, the old and traditional Shi'a players like the Da'wa, SCIRI or even the liberal Ahmad al-Chalabi were challenged by indigenous non-exiled powers. This explains in part the rivalry, disorder and chaotic positions that surfaced soon after the invasion, as local and exiled Shi'a powers had different and sometimes diverging outlooks. Although this study provides some key clues to understanding the present context through its historical background, it opens nonetheless the way for further studies concerned more with examining the changing religious, social and economic aspects in Iraq, especially since the Iraq-Iran war and onwards. Such studies certainly would shed more light on the domestic developments in Iraq, covert agencies and functions that were pursued by the Ba'th towards local powers and opposition movements alike.

Retrospect and reflections

Since the formation of the Iraqi state, Najaf has often been perceived as a political contender that could stand for Shi'a claims. Najaf, the home of the *marja'iyya* has truly developed its standing to propagate the Iraqi Shi'a cause yet with very traditional instruments. Yet, the nature of the *marja'iyya* itself and its peculiar autonomy comes into conflict with the sovereignty of the modern nation state. This incompatibility between the demands of the modern nation state (national loyalty) and the Shi'a

[827] For details about the Shi'a groups' standing at the eve of 2003, see Kubba, Laith, Iraqi Shi'i Politics, chapter 6, pp.141-50, in, (edit) Potter, Lawrence G. & Sick, Gary, G, *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, ibid; Francke, Rend Rahim, The Opposition, chapter 12, pp. 153-77, in, Hazelton, Fran, *Iraq since the Gulf War*.

marja'iyya as a leader and representative of the Shi'a community remains one of the most awkward and unresolved issues. However, as institution, the *marja'iyya* in Najaf failed to translate the Shi'a mandate into a permanent mechanism (group, campaign, etc) that could develop a genuine Iraqi alternative, representing the varied Iraqi groups in order to counter the denominational project of Baghdad's authority.

Additionally, in contrast to Sunnism, which has long ago moved politics into the civilian sphere, taking a more 'realistic' approach and keeping the role of clerics to a minimum, Shi'a Islam has always associated politics with Imamate as a divine position.[828] With this understanding, Shi'a Islam has always viewed politics through an'idealistic' and 'utopian' lens, which increasingly regarded the political sphere in modern times as a space for corruption and immorality.[829]

Even within the civilian domain, Shi'a politicians are almost always associated with religious institutions, as they continued a clear tendency of reconciling political ends with religious doctrines. This doctrinal and non-compromising understanding relates to Najaf's view of politics, which itself was shaped by theology and history.

Furthermore, the rigidity of Shi'a religious discourse made the Shi'a political movement operate as a kind of vanguard group, which contributed in limiting its influence over other sectors of Iraqi society. Like many Sunni formations and religious groups in general, the Shi'a movement did not transform into a mass movement especially within a diverse society like Iraq. The Iraqi Shi'a movement has failed dramatically in gaining success among lower classes (workers and peasents) and achieved little success within Iraqi middle classes in general.

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[828] About Sunni political thought, see for example, Crone, P, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. Edinburgh University Press-2005, Ch, 16.pp.219-47. For modern new interpretation, see Shaikh Muhammad al-Ghazali's view, in Abu-Rabi', I, *Contemporary Arab Thought, Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, Pluto Press, London-2004, 1st published, pp.227-8.

[829] For good account of Shi'a theory of political authority, see Lambton, A K, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, Oxford University Press-1985, pp.219-87; Sachedina, 'A A, *The Just Ruler*, (*al-Sultan al-'adil*) *in Shi'ite Islam*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford, 1988, Ch,3, pp.89-118.

New Shi'a experience and new literature: prospect for future studies

As I finished the main body of this thesis, I was fortunate to come across some recent publications by Shi'i *'ulama* and ex-Shi'a activists. These works include the memoirs of Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, *'Uqood min Hayati* (Decades of My Life), Talib al-Rifa'i's accounts, titled, *Amali Talib al-Rifa'i* and 'Ali al-Kourani's memoirs *Tajrobati ela Talib al-'Alim* (My Experience to the Student of Religious Knowledge). The importance of these works lies not only in the wide period covered (between the beginning of the 20th century and late 1970s) and extensive information included but, chiefly, in the fact that they provide a first hand account of the experiences of Shi'i *'ulama*.

One such account comes from Kashif al-Ghita's book and relates to the 1920 Iraqi Revolution, in which, Kashif al-Ghita sheds fresh light on his negative position towards the Revolution, obviously affected by the views of his master, Sayyed Kadhim al-Yazdi. 'Ali al-Kourani's book also gives good details of al-Da'wa's legacy. For example, al-Kourani highly regards Abdul Sahib al-Dekhil's role in the Da'wa, considering it to be larger than the role played by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, an impression that is also repeated in al-Rifa'i's book.

Although my conclusion of these works would not affect the main findings and conclusions presented in this thesis, there is need to re-read the new literature published recently. The legacy of al-Da'wa, for instance, requires fresh readings especially concerning the role of some leading figures like Abu Hassan al-Sibaiti, who pursued a clear Iraqi direction amid the euphoria of the Iranian revolution. There is also need to examine the relationship between the Shi'a Islamic movement (al-Da'wa in particular) and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr with Iran during the early phase (Najafi years). This reading, I assume, would revise most conclusions presented in Shi'a studies during the last three decades.

The main feature that characterized Shi'a political activism since its inception in contemporary Iraq has been the irreconcilable contradiction of Shi'a political discourse at two levels, political movements and the religious institution (*marja'iyya*). The very movement depended on its legitimacy and existence upon the Shi'i *'ulama*, who almost refrained from taking an active political role. Although Najaf stresses its traditional claim of political aloofness, and thus leavs ample space for political agencies (Shi'a activists), the *marja'iyya* in fact showed contradicting signs in this regard. Current political developments in Iraq have demonstrated that Najafi *'ulama* have not hesitated in criticizing the governing Da'wa party, which appeared almost dependent on the *'ulama's* consent. Najaf's *marja'iyya* showed clear support for the Shi'a Coalition and this was the main reason for the successful performance of Shi'a parties. Thus, Najaf's *marja'iyya* seems to have the upper hand over Shi'a politicians, who appear powerless before the *'ulama*. Clearly, Najaf's *marja'iyya* displayed both aloofness and an active political role, indicating both a pragmatic involvement and an unresolved doctrinal understanding concerning politics. This ever-changing performance has affected the positions of Najaf's *marja'iyya(s)*, Shi'a political activists and even ordinary people. Until today, the limits and responsibilities of '*ulama* in political processes are vague within Najafi seminaries. Conflicting trends within the Iraqi Shi'a landscape demonstrated this confusion and this is likely to continue for quite a long time.

Appendics, 1, Najaf: home of Arab Christianity before Islam

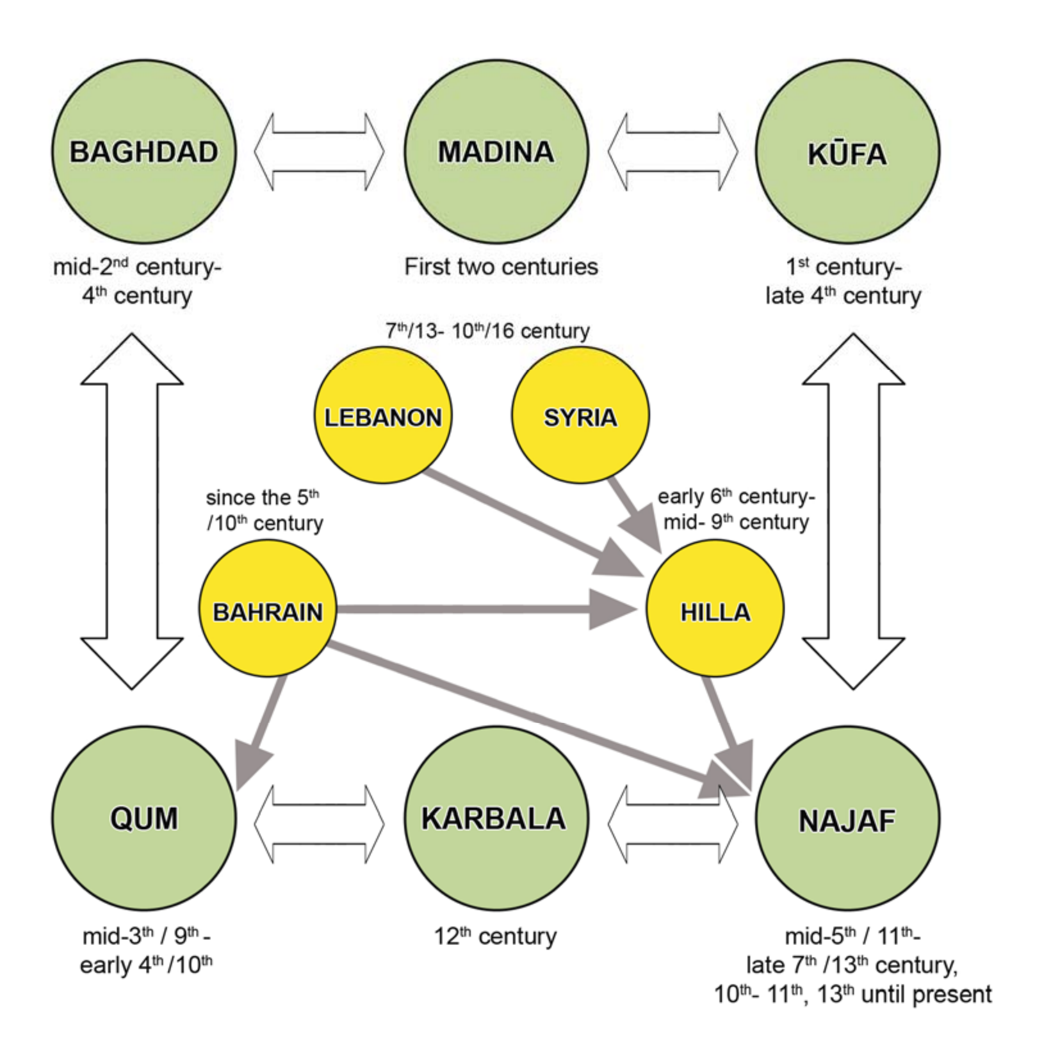


Remains of Christian Church discovered recently in Najaf



Cross appears on a church discovered in Najaf, **Source: www.najaf-news.com , al-Najaf News**

Appendics, 2, the evolution of Shi'a learning world from Madina to Najaf



This diagram is based on information provided by al-Fadhli, Bahr-u-Ulum, Momen and some others.

Glossary

Akhbariyya: the Shi'a school of jurisprudence, which rejects and forms of *ijtihad* and calls for using only the akhbars (traditions) attributed to the Prophet Muhammadand the Twelevth Imams.

Al: the house of or clan.

Al-'Atabat Al-Muqadasah: literally means the sacred threshold, refers exclusively to the holy places in Najaf, Karbala, Kadhamayya, Samara in Iraq and Qum and Mushhad in Iran.

Ayatollah: literally means a sign of God; a very recent title used to distinguish great *mujtahids* or Shi'i '*ulama* who usually published their *Risalah 'Amalaya* to be used by their followers.

Faqih: a jurist who studied Islamic law for many years and aquired the capability to use independently reason to reach a *fatwa* or an opinion.

Fatwa: a religious order given by a Mujtahid.

Fiqh: Islamic law.

Hadith: sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad and the Twelfth Imams.

Hawza'Al-Miyya: seminaries of religious education.

Ijtihad: using reasoning thinking based on the Quran, Hadith, etc.

Imam: a leader of prayer and in Shi'a typology is rarely used exept to refer to the Twelveth Imams.

Ithna 'Asharayya: named after the Twelvth Shi'a Imams and denoting their followers.

Jihad: holy war declared by Muslim '*ulama* against invaders.

Killidar: also cllaed *Sadin*, is the man appointed in charge of administrating the affairs holy places, Imam 'Ali, for instance. He almost always comes from a *Sadah* family.

Khums: the fifth, donating the money paid by Shi'a faithful to specific *mujtahid*.

Madrasa: school

Majalis al-ta'ziya: religious gathering held to commemorate the death of the Twelfth Imams, notably but not exclusively in Muharam.

Marja'i al-taqlid: literally means source of imitation; this concept used specifically by Shi'a faithful to refer to the *mujtahid* they follow in *fatwas* and instructions and who receives *Khums* money.

Mawakib: a gathering of people who organize the ceremony for commoration of the death of Imam Hussain during Muharam.

Mirza: a title given to Shi'a religious man who belonges, from the side of his mother, to the Prophet Muhammad.

Mujtahid: 'Alim (plu. *'ulama*) who has a religious qualification and capability to use reasoning method to reach religious rulings.

Muharam: the first month in the Islamic calendar and for Shi'a faithful is the most celebrated dates as Imam Hussain killed in the tenth of Muharam in 680/ 61. The tenth of Muharam also called Ashura, where commemorations reach its peack.

Mulla: also called *Rauzakhoon* (a Persian word) or *mumin* in Arabic Shi'a jargon, is a reciter or reader of *Muharam* story.

Mumin: see above

Radood: reciter of a poem especially in *Muharam*.

Risala 'Amalaya: a treatise authored by a mujtahids contains collections of fatwās that deal with life duties.

Sadin: (see above).

Safar: the second month in the Islamic calendar.

Sayyed: a descendant of the prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and Imam 'Ali.

Shaikh: within Shi’a seminaries, religious cleric called Shaikh to distinguish him from Sayyed. Shaikh also refers to tribal chief.

Shari ‘a: Islamic law.

Shirk: disbelief

Sirdab: a Persian word refers to

Taqiyya: prudent dissimulation; hiding truth or religious beliefe for fear of others.

Taqleed: imitation or following a *mujtahid* in issues of religious *fatwas*.

‘Ulama: (sin. ‘Alim) scholars of religious learning.

Usul al-Fiqh: principles of jurisprudence

Usuliyya: the main Shi’a dominant school in Iraq, Iran, Lebabon and the Gulf, which gives ‘*ulama* authority to use reasoning *ijtihad* to reach *fatwas*.

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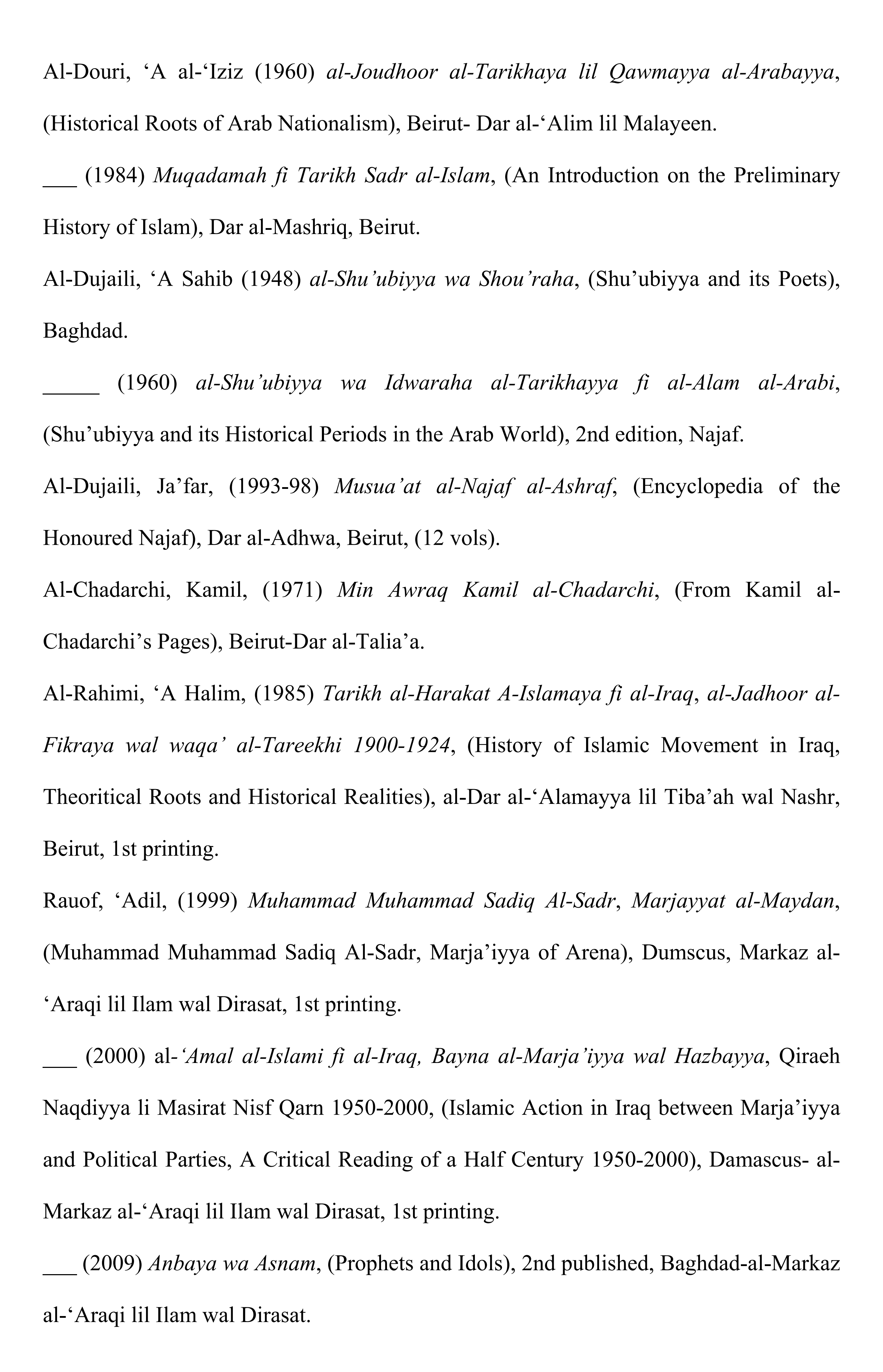
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